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ActEU Activating European Citizens' Trust in Times of Crises and Polarisation

Reporting on Deliverable D3.3 – Report (including policy recommendations) describing the relationships between trust and participation within the fields of immigration and climate change on the basis of web-scraped data and survey experiments

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ActEU Activating European Citizens' Trust in Times of Crises and Polarisation

Report (including policy recommendations) describing the relationships between trust and participation within the fields of immigration and climate change on the basis of web-scraped data and survey experiments

Executive Summary

Felix-Christopher von Nostitz (ICL), Giulia Sandri (ULB, previously ICL)

The central aim of the report is to describe the relationships between political trust and political participation. More specifically, it focuses on the circumstances under which citizens are more likely to choose less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation, especially protest action. While there is extensive literature on declining political trust in general, and its effect on voting behaviour and the rise of radical parties in particular, there are fewer studies on political trust and its links to other forms of political participation, especially more contentious forms of political participation such as protest. Furthermore, past research on trust, mistrust and distrust has revealed no clear consensus about whether a certain degree of political distrust is healthy or unhealthy for representative democracy, as turning to less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation may reflect discontent with the political status quo, but not necessarily signal a lack of political trust. This report addresses this gap by outlining the relationship between trust and participation based on multiple data sources: European Social Survey (ESS) data, the ActEU focus group data, the ActEU survey data including a vignette experiment, and web-scraped data from X. Furthermore, the report outlines if the relationship between political trust and political participation depends on how polarised an issue is by focusing on climate change and immigration policy.

Through our systematic comparative analysis of trends and patterns of the relationships between political trust and political participation across multiple and complementary data sources, this report shows that:

(1) Based on the ESS data we find that, overall, trusting political actors and institutions decreases the probability of having participated in legal and unlawful public demonstrations. But respondents mistrustful towards political actors and institutions are more inclined to participate in legal and unlawful demonstrations.

(2) Political participation matters for political trust and vice versa. The central contribution we gain from the ActEU Focus Group data (Berkowitz and Weissenbach 2024) is twofold: firstly, the empirical findings from the ActEU Focus Groups build into the theoretical rationale of D3.3, which helps us to improve our understanding of the overall relationship between political participation and trust, before later in the report we narrow this down in the polarised policies *climate change* and *immigration*: (Different aspects of) Political participation matters for trust. a). We observe participation-related aspects on the behavioural and perceptual level of participation that play a role in citizens" (dis)trust, which we call participatory trust. b.) We observe that citizens' perception on how to engage in the democratic process and to have access to process knowledge on decision-making processes and participation options matters for whether they have "confidence in regime institutions and approval of incumbent office holders" (Norris 2017, p. 24) – which is our definition of trust. Thus, overall, we see that the topic of contentious forms of participation in the field of

climate change triggered intense discussions. By contrast, while we see many discussions on the topic of immigration as a challenge, we barely finds narrations regarding political participation or contentious action in the field of immigration.

Secondly, based on focus group data on Czechia, France, Germany and Greece we show under which circumstances citizens generally engage in institutionalised (and less contentious) forms of political participation and under what circumstances they lose trust in institutionalised forms of participation and turn to unconventional (and more contentious) forms. Participants tend to talk about the efficacy of participation more than anything else, followed by types of participation – voting, demonstrations, and party membership. Thus, their main concern is not how they participate but to what extent do these forms of participation make a difference. For Germany and Czechia trust in participation seems to rely more than anything else on how efficient they feel participation is. In both cases, trust in the efficacy of political participation of different types is not widespread. By contrast, the French focus groups discussions about perceptions of participation are not linked to efficacy but about disapproval of the political system, at the same time that they stress voting and unconventional collective action, as well as conventional demonstrations, to voice this disapproval.

(3) In terms of the manifestations of this relation between political trust and political participation specific to the policy field of climate change, based on the analysis of the ESS we find the same as for the overall trend. We further find that broadly speaking, worrying about climate change and feeling responsible for it contributed to increased trustful attitudes. Conversely, being indifferent about climate change and not feeling responsible for it increased mistrustful attitudes. In addition, the inclusion of polarised opinions on climate change does not seem to change the previous mentioned trends. In the analysis of the ActEU survey, we find the opposite effect, where generally trustful views on MPs increase the probability of having participated in unconventional political activities (demonstrations, strikes, unauthorised protest activities) while we find a statistically insignificant relationship for political distrust and the probability to join unauthorised protests. Further, we find that where political polarisation on climate change is evidenced, the relationship between political trust and choosing to take part in public demonstrations is strengthened and that recent participation in a demonstration is positively associated with trust in MPs. In addition, the links between polarisation, political trust, and the decision to take part in more contentious forms of participation, such as demonstrations, do not refer only to those with pro-climate or climate justice positions, but also to those with climate-sceptic positions. Our analysis also shows that those who took part in strikes are more likely to have positive opinions about climate sceptics and negative opinions about those who accept the scientific reality of anthropogenic climate change (i.e. that climate change is driven by human actions), pointing to a strong relationship between polarisation and strike action for survey respondents that may be linked to actions in 2024. In terms of the vignette experiment, we find where opposition to a policy is concerned, political distrust appears to be more important in the general relationship between polarisation, political trust, and protest. Here, those who declared they were likely to join a peaceful demonstration or an occupation of a parliament building (a more contentious option), were also more distrustful of MPs at different levels. Our tentative analysis of web-scraped data suggests that X has much more climate sceptic content, and that most of that climate sceptic content is linked with political distrust. Further, pro-climate and trustful users are politically active in a range of different ways, while distrust and climate scepticism are linked only to action through political parties. Though this seems to challenge other findings from the survey data, the literature points to strong links to

populist right-wing parties and climate scepticism in Europe, and announcing potentially illegal protest participation on X is less likely that confirming it in an anonymous survey.

(4) Based on the ESS, for immigration we find considerable country and over-time variations in terms of polarisation, but this does not seem to correlate with the levels of pro- or anti-immigration attitudes. When we further assess the link between polarisation, participation and political trust cross-nationally, we find respondents with high trust in national-level institutions tend to participate more in non-electoral activities when they hold more polarised attitudes towards immigration within their national context. This probability is higher when the high levels of trust in national institutions are combined with low levels of trust in the European Parliament, which means that high political trust does not seem to be automatically associated with more participation. Holding pro-immigration attitudes increases the probability of non-electoral participation, while holding anti-immigration attitudes decreases this probability. This is true irrespective of the levels of trust. However, we see that in some countries the overall probabilities of engaging in non-electoral participation are quite different and mobilise different groups depending on their levels of trust. Broadly speaking, we do not find that higher polarised views on immigration reinforce the interaction between the degree of political trust and the recourse to less conventional and more contentious types of political participation. Zooming in on the ActEU survey, we find that most respondents think that immigration is good for the economy, while views on the cultural impact of immigration tend to be more severe across most countries. For ethnic/racial prejudice in attitudes towards immigration the distribution of responses is relatively similar across countries, but we can observe a greater polarisation of views in some cases compared to others. The results from the ActEU survey experiment show that the most consequential factor is the degree of contention and cost of the political action, with the policy field and the type of mobilising actor having no significant impact on the likelihood of joining the action. Indeed, even if the immigration issues increasingly polarise public opinions in Europe, this polarisation does not trigger in itself the recourse to more contentious forms of political mobilisation. Besides, the weak influence of this topic alone challenges the assumption that growing polarisation on immigration would strengthen the interaction between political trust and acceptability of protest actions. In addition, the empirical work based on the ActEU experimental survey even highlights that mobilisation on immigration seems to be lower than for policy fields like climate change and gender equality. Likewise, the analyses of web-scraped data emanating from X show that high levels of politicisation on immigration do not tend to feed the calls for participation expressed by European citizens. These two results challenge the idea that increasing degrees of polarisation in this policy field deepen the relationship linking levels of political trust and higher degrees of acceptability regarding protest actions.

In sum, our in-depth analyses of patterns and trends of the relationships between political trust and political participation suggest that participants tend to talk about the efficacy of participation more than anything else, followed by types of participation – voting, demonstrations, and party membership. Thus, their main concern is not how they participate but to what extent these forms of participation make a difference. This included turning to unconventional modes like protest as conventional seen as less effective. We also see that levels of trust affect participation. We find that both low and high trust can trigger more participation and especially higher participation in unconventional political activities. While a mixed picture emerges depending on the data analysed, overall and across the two policy fields of climate change and immigration we find respondents with high trust in politics tend to participate more in non-electoral activities and thus unconventional forms of participation. Surprisingly we find that those who took part in strikes are

more likely to have climate change sceptic positions while having pro-immigration attitudes increases the probability of non-electoral participation. So, activists that rely on unconventional forms of participation seem not to correspond to how they are often portrayed in the press and by politicians concerning the two policy areas as pro-climate, anti-immigration and mistrusting of politics. In both cases, they trust political actors and institutions, albeit not at all levels equally, and are a much more heterogeneous group with both positive and negative attitudes to climate change and immigration policies.

The findings in this report invite four main policy-relevant recommendations for different target groups.

1. First, political actors and institutions across all levels must invest and commit to **trust-building measures**. Trust in all institutions and across all Member States continues to decline, and since political trust affects political participation, rebuilding it can foster an open and inclusive public debate. This, in turn, enables institutions to improve and meet citizens' increasing expectations, thereby reinforcing democracy.

   How can politicians and policymakers foster trust-building measures in the field of participation? We recommend not only enhancing citizens' knowledge of the available participation options but, more importantly, clarifying how their participatory efforts contribute to the decision-making process. It is crucial for citizens to "trace" the outcomes and impacts of their actions. Therefore, we highly recommend (digital) innovations that ensure both traceability of citizens' actions and transparent feedback loops between decision-making processes and the individuals or groups active in the relevant policy field. For instance, policymakers should foster the adoption of **interactive legislative dashboards** and other e-participation platforms by parliamentary assemblies at all levels (European, national, regional, local) that track legislative proposals, debates, and voting records. These dashboards can show the progress of initiatives, highlight citizen-submitted suggestions, and indicate how feedback was incorporated into the final decision. Moreover, public authorities, especially at the local level, could promote **mobile applications** that are designed to notify users about upcoming public consultations, town hall meetings, or policy changes. They could also provide interactive timelines showing the evolution of a policy based on citizen feedback. In terms of non-digital innovations, policymakers could increase the number of regularly scheduled**, open public meetings** (at local level, such as community town hall meetings) where citizens can directly hear from and question decision-makers about the outcomes of their participation.

2. This leads to our second recommendation to **secure the right to protest** and **take citizens' demands seriously.** Many participants still have high trust in politics to resolve the issues they care about, and dismissing or misinterpreting their concerns as mere mistrust might push them toward more extreme actions—ranging from street protests to protest voting. Decision-makers should recognize the heterogeneity of the profiles involved in protest actions; treating these movements as a homogeneous group is erroneous and may lead to dynamics of (co-)radicalization. Reaching out to and listening to citizens' concerns is essential to prevent further erosion of political trust of all European citizens in their institutions and to mitigate political discontent. In short, to meet citizens' increasing expectations, governments must invest in improving the mechanisms through which all people are given a voice and are heard. Providing equal opportunities for representation in decision-making

is a key factor that distinguishes democracy from other forms of government. Governments must focus not only on policy outcomes but also on the decision-making processes if they are to preserve democratic institutions and norms.

Potential measures to be adopted or strengthened in the near future could include for instance: creating dedicated offices within local or national governments to serve as **points of contact for protest groups** and to be responsible for organising dialogue sessions, gathering protester input, and providing timely feedback on how their concerns are being addressed; establishing **independent commissions** to monitor law enforcement's response during protests and to investigate any abuses, ensuring that protesters' rights are protected; developing **both digital and non-digital feedback systems** (such as suggestion boxes at protest sites or online platforms) that allow protestors to share their experiences and recommendations after events, while their input can be integrated into policy reviews and reforms; issuing **regular public reports** detailing how protester concerns have influenced policy changes or adjustments.

3. Lastly, to improve the study of climate change, this report deplores a lack of regularity concerning the investigation of environmental issues in European surveys. For instance, if we focus on the ESS dataset, questions related to climate change were included in only three waves (the 8th, the 10th and the 11th ones). We recommend, thus, to include question items on environmental issues in all waves moving forward, similarly to what is already the case for the core items that allow measuring attitudes to immigration in the ESS.

Our diverse data sources indicate that the levels of **political polarisation**—both in general and on issues such as climate change and immigration—are **lower than originally anticipated**. However, even these moderate levels of polarisation can have significant implications for public discourse. To enhance the quality and dynamics of political debate, we recommend that **politicians and policymakers consciously avoid framing discussions in terms of polarisation**. Publicly emphasising polarisation can inadvertently reinforce a vicious cycle of fragmented, conflictual, and divisive debates. Framing issues in a polarising manner may amplify divisions, even when the actual levels of disagreement are moderate. Instead, a focus on shared values and common objectives can promote a more constructive dialogue. This approach not only helps reduce unnecessary conflict but also encourages collaboration across political and ideological lines. In practical terms, this could result in the creation, for instance, of "Common Ground" forums. In these forums, experts, community leaders, and policymakers could engage in dialogue that centres on shared challenges—such as the impact of climate change on local communities or the economic contributions of immigrants. By emphasising common concerns and collaborative problem-solving, such forums would help shift the narrative away from divisiveness and toward collective action. This strategy has been successfully implemented in various municipalities where community-led dialogues have led to innovative, bipartisan solutions.

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1 Introduction

Felix-Christopher von Nostitz (ICL), Giulia Sandri (ULB, previously ICL)

Studies of the crisis of representative democracy very often highlight that this is largely a crisis of political participation. They highlight the declining and changing nature of political participation in Europe. In this context many studies aim to identify what explains these changes in political participation among citizens. One central factor that emerges from these discussions, but for which we still lack clear empirical findings, is political trust or the lack of as a key trigger for political participation. For example, declining political trust is generally believed to be a major factor shaping contemporary voting behaviour and influencing the rise of radical parties. But less attention has been paid to the level of political trust and its link to other forms of political participation especially more contentious forms of political participation such as protest. Here the Yellow Vests (Gilets Jaunes) movement in France is a good example to highlight how citizens are making increasing use of more contentious forms of political participation to voice their grievances and express their dissatisfaction with politics in their country. Against this backdrop, this report focuses on describing the relationships between trust and participation focusing on when citizens are more likely to choose less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation, especially protest action.

However, the growing participation and involvement in more contentious political action do not always indicate lack of trust in politics or even political disconnection. Past research has demonstrated that citizens have progressively broadened their range of political activities overtime. Consequently, in some cases, increased engagement in less conventional political action may not solely reflect a crisis of political trust and representative democratic, but rather a strong commitment to a cause, interest in participating in and influencing decision-making and even high level of trust in politics to address this issue.

The right and possibility to protest and take part in other less conventional political action are essential in contemporary democracy for citizen to be heard, given that a considerable number of European countries are facing increasing electoral abstention rates that are often viewed as a signal of declining trust in politics and democratic institutions, of political disaffection and dissatisfaction with democracy (Morales et al. 2024). Restricting such rights in Europe might further fuel the rise in electoral support for populist, radical and extreme political parties. Therefore, citizens turning to less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation reflect a discontent with the political status quo but not necessarily a lack of political trust. Less conventional political action reinforces or overcomes limitations to what they perceive can be achieved through more conventional means of participation including pushing back against the rise of more radical parties and policies.

The main aims of this report are the following. First, based on focus group data, we develop an abductive iteration of the theoretical rationale of D3.3. By exploring citizens' approval and support of representative institutions, demands and changes regarding participatory patterns, we identify our key guiding concept of participatory trust to understand better under what circumstances citizens engage in institutionalised forms of political participation, under what circumstances they lose trust in institutionalised forms of participation and turn to unconventional forms or more contentious forms of political participation.

Second, we look at the relationship between trust and political participation in two policy areas: climate change and immigration. Both are marked by a high level of unconventional participation and large variations of political trust among citizens in politics to address. Further, both are highly polarising societies. In order to analyse the relationship between trust, political participation and polarisation we use the European Social Survey (ESS) to trace attitudes towards climate change and immigration, political participation and political trust over time and across countries. Next, we will use the Act EU vignette survey experiment to better understand in which hypothetical situation respondents would decide to join a political action organized by specific actors. This allows us to see how who organizes (political trust in actor) what type of event (conventional or unconventional action) in which of the two policy areas affects citizens' political participation.

Last, we use web scrapped data emanating from the social media Twitter/X. to trace who speaks about each policy area when and how on Twitter. This provides further insights into how polarised the posts are concerning the two policy areas among its' users and how many express (mis)trust in politics and mention conventional or unconventional political participation options.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth literature review on the intersection of political trust, political participation and polarisation with a specific focus on how different levels of trust lead to different types of participation. Before doing so the chapter first defines what we mean by both political trust and political participation. Overall, it shows that the overall research on political trust, mistrust and distrust has offers no consensus on the question of whether a certain degree of political distrust is healthy or unhealthy for representative democracy (see Morales 2017, p 129). It also introduces and explains our theoretical rationale of participatory trust underlying our central research question, and presents the hypotheses that we test in the succeeding chapters.

Chapter 3 outlines the methods used in this report. It focuses on how we use the ActEU Focus group data, ESS data, outline details on the ActEU vignette experiment and finally the use of the web scraped data. As there are some differences between the two policy areas in terms of survey items used and data availability for example the policy chapters on climate change and immigration include additional and specific methodological information.

Chapter 4 presents the findings based on the ActEU focus group data. We analyse if, at the individual level, the more decision-making in formal representative institutions is perceived as untransparent by citizens, the greater the likelihood of opting for forms of participation that are outside formal institutional channels of representative democracy. We also study whether knowledge about procedures of political participation options in political institutions increases the likelihood of choosing participation options within or beyond formal institutions of representative democracy. This provides a first qualitative and in-depth insight into the relationship of trust, participation and the usefulness of our concept of participatory trust.

The next two chapters will turn to the relationship between trust and political participation in the two policy areas of immigration (chapter 5) and climate change (chapter 6). Both chapters will analyse how the polarisation of attitudes and discourses on each policy field shapes the link between political trust and political participation. To this end, we first present our measures of the polarisation of attitudes, political trust and political participation in the two policy areas. Next, we provide a cross-national overview of the relation between these three aspects of political orientations and behaviour using data from the European Social Survey. The two chapters then

zoom in to the results of the ActEU survey for 10 European countries in 2024 and the analysis of public discourse dynamics on social media based on the web-scraped data from Twitter/X. The final chapter will summarise the key findings and offers policy-relevant recommendations.

2 The intersection of political participation, polarisation and political trust

Max-Valentin Robert (ICL), Felix-Christopher von Nostitz (ICL), Kristina Weissenbach (UDE), Giulia Sandri (ULB)

It is often argued that political trust plays a key role in explaining political participation. This chapter provides an in-depth literature review on the intersection of political trust and political participation with a specific focus on how different levels of trust leads to different type of participations. Before doing so the chapter first defines what we mean by both trust and political participation. Then, we develop our theoretical rationale, and explain our research questions and hypotheses to investigate the relationship between trust and participation in the fields of climate change and immigration.

2.1 What is political (dis)trust?

More broadly, independently from the specific political field, trust is necessarily "relational and domain specific. That is, A trusts B to do X. Trust always has an object or target (B), which could be a person, group, or institution, and a domain of action (X) where trust is given or withheld. The foundation of trust is that A judges B to be trustworthy, that he or she will act with integrity and competence and with A's interests paramount" (Citrin and Stoker 2018, p. 50). Likewise, political trust can only be defined as "fundamentally relational and situational. It is relational because it has a subject who trusts and an object that is trusted; we do not argue that person A trusts without reference to a trust object. Trust is situational since it is commonly given or withheld with reference to specific types of actions or environments" (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017, p. 4). Consequently, political trust needs to be conceived as "a specific set of objects (political institutions and actors) and is both relational (having a subject and an object) and situational (characterized by a degree of uncertainty about the object's future actions)" (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017, p. 4).

Further the concept of political trust "comprises the two most specific levels of political support, that is confidence in regime institutions and approval of incumbent officeholders" (Norris 2017, p. 24). This notion can be therefore understood as "the general belief in the performance capacity of political institutions and/or belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity of office holders" (Norris 2017, p. 24). In the specific case of government actors, trust is interpreted as a facilitating factor for legitimation processes (Hough *et al.* 2010), and even as a dimension of legitimacy (Tyler and Jackson 2013).

Thus, a certain level of political trust is central for representative democracy to function. However, the literature outlines a decline in political trust. The lack of such political trust potentially arises in two distinct ways: mistrust and distrust. Indeed, the first one expresses "doubt or scepticism about the trustworthiness of the other", while the second one manifests "a settled belief that the other is untrustworthy" (Citrin and Stoker 2018, p. 50). While the latter clearly poses a challenge for democracy as "[d]isenchanted citizens may decide to withdraw from politics altogether – resulting in even more disenchantment – or provide fertile ground for the emergence of anti-system political parties" (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017, p. 1). The former, mistrust, raises the central question of "whether citizen distrust of government is inimical to democracy [...] or whether [...] it is a welcome and necessary citizen stance to ensure democratic survival [...] (Bertsou 2019, p. 214). As "critical citizens are more likely to engage in political activities and to keep office-holders accountable" (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017, 1). However, empirically driven work shows differentiated consequences of political trust depending on the studied level: "at the macro level, low levels of trust would undermine the stability of the regime [...] or, at best, signal structural

challenges that require transformation of the regime's institutions [...]. At the meso level, low political trust is related to changes in the structures of party competition [...] – most notably, by providing fertile ground for electoral success of new or populist parties [...]. And finally, at the micro level, low political trust would induce support for democratic reform [...] and erode citizens' compliance with the law" [...]. Thus, "*institutionalize distrust*, and democracies work when vigilant citizens use these institutions to oversee and monitor those positions of power" (Warren 2017, p. 34).

Overall, here trust is defined as level of trust by citizens in political actors in a specific (policy) context that reaches from no trust (distrust) to full trust. Further we have seen that lack of trust (mistrust) might be important for democracy. Here we ask how it might affect political participation. To do so we first need to outline what we mean by political participation

2.2 What is political participation?

The literature highlighted the huge diversity of political participatory acts, which "include, most importantly, voting, as well as contacting a public official, signing a petition, attending a protest, joining a political party or an organization that takes stands in politics, working in a campaign, attending a rally, or donating money to a campaign or political cause" (Lehman et al. 2022, p. 25). Parry et al. (1992, p. 50) add "political violence" to this list.

Political participation was traditionally understood in a succinct meaning – that is to say, "activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba and Nie 1972, p. 2). Brady suggested a similar definition, by conceptualizing political participation as "action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes" (1999, p. 737).

However, the most recent developments in the literature provide a broader understanding of what political participation is. Here, van Deth explains that "political participation can be loosely defined as citizens' activities affecting politics. [...] The list of specimens of political participation is virtually endless and includes such divergent phenomena as voting, demonstrating and boycotting – but also guerrilla gardening, volunteering, flash mobs and even suicide protest. Therefore, political participation can be defined as "an abstract or general concept that covers voluntary activities by citizens usually related to government, politics or the state (van Deth 2014, p. 353).

Further the literature of the distinguish between conventional modes – like campaigning or contacting officials – and unconventional modes of political participation – such as involvement in social movements or participation in protest actions (van Deth 2002, p. 14). Drawing a clear theoretical distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of participation is far from obvious, as this divide between both modes ""can be seen as a moving target. Indeed, as Giugni and Grasso (2022, p. 9) point out "certain forms of mobilisation that could be considered as unconventional in earlier times have become quite conventional today, if by this one means the proportion of people that engage in them". Consequently, "what were traditionally unconventional acts challenging the status quo have become more and more mainstream in the current historical juncture, whereas what were more conventional acts such as party membership have undergone sharp declines over time" (Giugni and Grasso 2022, p. 9-10). In this deliverable we look at both conventional and unconventional modes of participation and how level of trust plays a key role in overall level of participation, acceptance and choice of mode of political participation. Further we study how this differs across two police fields, immigration and climate change. Each of the respective chapters (chapter 5 and 6) will further outline the extant literature concerning the link

between trust and participation in the two policy areas. In particular, they will provide more details on the role polarisation might play here. Nevertheless, the next section will provide a more general overview of the literature on trust as an explanatory factor for participation.

2.2 Explaining political participation: political trust and beyond

First the literature outlines the link between political trust, political efficacy and participation. According to the traditional definition initially proposed by Campbell, Gurin and Miller, political efficacy can be conceptualized as "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process" (Campbell et al. 1954, p. 187). More recent works interpret this concept as "the perception that citizens are able to influence government and hold office-holders accountable" (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017, p. 5). However, Niemi et al. suggested to differentiate two kinds of political efficacy, by distinguishing internal political efficacy from external political efficacy – the first type referring to "beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics", while the second one being understood as "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands" (Niemi et al. 1991, p. 84-85). Besides, external political efficacy can be fostered by an active political participation (Finkel 1987; Quintelier and van Deth 2014).

The closeness of the relationship linking political trust with political efficacy was underlined by an emerging new literature (Geurkink et al. 2020). More specifically, the interactions between these two concepts were analysed through the proper effect of some intermediary variables, especially political participation (Gülsüm et al. 2021). For instance, the effect of political efficacy on voting was demonstrated (Lehman et al. 2022, p. 28). Broadly speaking, political efficacy tends to increase the probability of an individual's political involvement (Lehman et al. 2022, p. 29). Political efficacy can also exert some influence as an intermediary factor. Thus, in the British case, it was demonstrated that angers feeds participation in a context of strong degree of political efficacy (Magni 2017). However, the own effect of political efficacy can also be mediated by some political-institutional features, such as the electoral system (Karp and Banducci 2008, p. 311).

Next, a dense literature highlighted the influence of (inter-)individual determinants on political participation. Such a stance was summarized by Lehman et al. (2022): "In a majority of cases, individual political activists are self-starters [...]. Frequently, however, they become active because someone asked. [...] In an era of digital communications and social media, recruiting others to take part has become easier" (Lehman et al. 2022, p. 32). For instance, online social media, but also social networks – even those remaining informal, such as networks of friends or colleagues – facilitate mobilisation and commitment (Teorell 2003; Diani 2004). Thus, "the political behaviour literature has talked about the importance of everyday life networks outside of voluntary associations and it includes ties such as friendships, neighbours, or colleagues from work, and even fleeting encounters at bus stops or doctors' offices" (Bridgman and Stolle 2022, p. 708). Likewise, "[e]xperiences in the family, at school, in the workplace, in voluntary organizations, and in church affect the resources, motivations, and exposures to political mobilisation that, in turn, affect political participation" (Lehman et al. 2022, p. 33). Nonetheless, "social networks do not just have mobilising effects and they can also exert social pressures that might contribute to refraining from participation" (Bridgman and Stolle 2022, p. 703).

Further, socialization is frequently mentioned as an additional factor explaining individual propensities to political participation. Understood as a process (Muxel 2022, p. 691-693), it can be defined as "the acquisition of prevailing norms, learning about politics in a multitude of ways, and ideological orientations which concretely activate the building of the individual's political identity"

(Muxel 2022, p. 689-690). However, Serra and Smets identify the influence of different elements framing political socialization, which are (1) formative years, (2) socializing agents, but also (3) generation and cohort effects (Serra and Smets 2022, p. 545-548).

Among the (inter-)individual factors feeding political participation, the weight of culture and values can be underlined. Indeed, Deutsch explains that "[c]ultural value orientations are an important independent variable for studying political participation in their own right" (Deutsch 2022, p. 505). Values can be defined as "stable and enduring orientations, learned in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, and associated with a range of political outcomes" (Heath et al. 2022, p. 630). Political values are perceived as having "substantial explanatory power for understanding individuals' propensities to engage in different forms of political action" (Heath et al. 2022, p. 649), and a set of particular values were identified as linked with several modes of political participation: "democratic values being particularly relevant to electoral participation, and postmaterialist values to non-electoral participation" (Heath et al., p 648). In addition, values can be interpreted as "representing general frameworks shaping the kinds of action that the individual (or the community) find acceptable or desirable. They shape and circumscribe the repertoire of political actions that the individual will be likely to consider" (Heath et al. 2022, p. 649).

Individual characteristics also frame the recourse for different modes of political participation, even if these individual features tend to interact with the broad context in a given country. Thus, the way societies "conceive of racial categories and structures is a function of their unique socio-political histories and processes" (Abrajano et al. 2020, 607). If an intersectional analytical perspective on political participation is mobilised, we can propose a deeper viewpoint about "distribution of power and resources in society" (Slaughter and Brown 2022, p. 738). This distribution of power echoes with the biographical determinants of political participation: "the biographical outcomes of political participation are not straightforwardly determinable, but are conditioned heavily by structural inequalities, such as class, gender, race, and sexuality" (Roth and Saunders 2022, p. 808). Indeed, "political acts are not straightforwardly high or low risk: what is low risk to some groups is high risk to others. The costs of action are interpreted differently by different social groups. So, too, are the benefits of participation unequally distributed. A privileged person can invest more time in volunteering to slowly build a career than can someone less privileged" (Roth and Saunders 2022, p. 808). This inequality about the individual potential of political participation is therefore articulated with the inequality about biographical consequences – a concept which refers to "the consequences of activism on the biographies of activists, such as their prospects for and choices of employment, their date of entry into the workplace and their domestic lives [...]" (Roth and Saunders 2022, p. 797). Likewise, social inequalities, but also educational factors, were identified as influential on political participation patterns, such as turnout (Evans and Hepplewhite 2022, p. 579-581). In a similar perspective, the individual social position was studied as an explanatory factor for non-voting (Mayer 2022, p. 70-72) and protest (Mayer 2022, p. 74).

Last, differentiated psychosocial and emotional profiles feed distinct attitudes towards political participation. First of all, we should recall that emotions are highly influential on political behaviours due to the determining effect of feelings on cognitive processes (Damasio 1994). In addition, "social identity has strong emotional implications, and personality traits influence what emotions are experienced and how strongly. Such interactions need to be considered if we are to fully understand why individuals engage in political activity" (Renström and Bäck 2022, p. 161). More specifically, angry individuals are inclined to favour political participation (Nai 2022, 670)

and often display risk-seeking behaviours (Lerner and Keltner 2000, 2001). However, positive emotions as well as negative ones tend to reciprocally feed individual dispositions to participate in protests (Sabucedo and Vilas 2014). For instance, hopeful people tend to get involved in political actions, as hope constitutes "a source for collective [mobilisation] and action to achieve the set goal" (Bar-Tal et al. 2007, p. 449). Likewise, individuals displaying a strong openness to experience "will participate in politics if it promises new input, new experiences, and intellectual stimuli" (Ackermann 2022, p. 615). Besides, people expressing high degrees of extraversion "should particularly enjoy social forms of political action. They value political participation as an opportunity for interaction" (Ackermann 2022, p. 616).

Returning to our distinction of types of political participation, political trust was frequently described as deeply influential on the individual potential recourse to conventional participation. As Gabriel explains, "conventional political participation in general [...] as well as specific forms of conventional political activity [...] are fostered by political trust" (Gabriel 2017, p. 236). Such a viewpoint is particularly noticeable in culturalist theories of democracy, characterized by an "approach [which] looks at trust and participation as closely interrelated parts of a syndrome of civic attitudes and behaviours fostering the stability and performance of democracy" (Gabriel 2017, p. 229). If we focus on a particular example of conventional participation (voting), we can refer to the close relationship linking political decision with political trust by stressing its heuristic dimension (Rudolph 2017).

Indeed, Rudolph claims that "the task of making political judgments is often complicated by two factors. First, many citizens are not particularly well informed about political matters. Second, many citizens are not motivated to become well informed because they have a preference for engaging in less effortful forms of information processing. [...] Because people are motivated to have a sufficient degree of confidence in their policy judgments, though, they will look for opportunities to simplify their decision-making process. Heuristics provide such an opportunity" (Rudolph 2017, p. 200). Now, if we follow this theoretical viewpoint, trust can be considered as heuristic: "In the context of forming policy judgments about new or untested government policies, a burgeoning line of research has suggested that political trust, or trust in government, serves as particularly useful heuristic. Under this trust-as-heuristic thesis, political trust operates as a simple heuristic or decision rule that enables people to more easily make evaluative judgments concerning government policies or actions" (Rudolph 2017, p. 200). If the described process "implies a linkage between political trust and beliefs about government credibility" (Rudolph 2017, p.200), and if the electoral decision is based on "policy judgments", political trust therefore can be mobilised as a "useful heuristic", because it "reduces complex policy judgments to a simple question of trust" (Rudolph 2017, p 209).

Nevertheless, the relationship between electoral participation and political trust seems to be much more ambiguous about the vote for challenger and/or populist parties. Of course, by channelling "the expression of disenchantment" towards the mainstream political offer, "challenger parties contribute not only to keeping dissatisfied voters within the system, but also to discouraging them from using unconventional means of protest action" (Bélanger 2017, p. 244). However, anti-elitism was shown to be one of the main determinants of the vote for populist parties (Bélanger 2017, p. 247-248). Consequently, political distrust was described to be as much a cause as a consequence of the support for these kinds of parties (Rooduijn 2013), even if "political distrust might also lead some citizens to not vote at all" (Bélanger 2017, p. 251). Thus, by taking into account results showing that "political distrust at the individual level is linked to both challenger party support and abstention",

Eric Bélanger hypothesizes that "at the macro level, distrust has created fertile ground for the growth of challenger parties, but also an environment that is more conducive to the decline in voter turnout" (Bélanger 2017, p. 251). More generally, and if we rely on the theory of political support-alienation, (dis)trust should be considered as a factor determining the degree of political involvement: therefore, and depending on the state of the relationship between participation and trust, "political apathy, conventional political activity or political protest will result" (Gabriel 2017, p. 229).

If political trust is expected to feed the probabilities of resorting to political participation, the reverse relationship is supposedly at work when unconventional modes of participation are dealt with low levels of political trust would tend to favour the recourse to unconventional participation. Such a reasoning was drawn during the rise of protest movements between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s: "The coincidence of declining political trust and the formation of the protest movement gave grounds for asking the question of whether these two developments were causally related to each other, or, to put it more precisely, whether people turned to protest activities because they did not trust political actors and institutions any longer" (Gabriel 2017, p. 233).

Indeed, a weakening of political trust was noticed by several analysts, and this process was interpreted as the causal origin of two trends: the development of an "elite challenging behaviour" – referring to the rise of protest activities, whatever they are considered as legal or not – and the refusal of "elite directed participation" – exemplified by usual modes of civic participation (Inglehart 1979). In this context, unconventional participation was therefore interpreted as the usual behaviour of the distrusting (and politically dissatisfied) post-materialist citizens (Gabriel 2017, p. 234). Indeed, "people who trust the government or the political institutions do not have an incentive to use political protest as a means of making their voices heard. Or the other way round: people distrusting political leaders or political institutions will be more strongly motivated to engage in protest than trusting citizens" (Gabriel 2017, p. 235-236).

Such a reasoning was confirmed by empirically-driven works, which frequently showed that "socially excluded individuals who are also rejection sensitive, and therefore also experience the most negative emotions due to being excluded, are those most likely to engage with a group, or to even become radicalized" (Renström and Bäck 2022, p. 161). For example, according to a case study conducted in Germany with focus groups, citizens involved in local protest movements tend to "considered themselves as experienced and knowledgeable in the local context, in contrast to politicians and representatives at a regional or national level" (Butzlaff and Messinger-Zimmer 2020, p. 257). Similar trends were mentioned in the US case: participants in unconventional protest tend to be more alienated from the conventional political system, but also more radical and socially disadvantaged (DiGrazia 2014). The same tendency was shown in works focusing on developing countries: thus, Jamaicans expressing distrustful views towards their government are more prone to get involved in unconventional modes of political participation (Bourne, 2010). From a broader perspective, and from a cross-national analytical viewpoint, Hooghe and Marien demonstrated a positive relationship between high degrees of political trust and institutionalized participation, as well as a negative relationship between strong level of trust and non-institutionalized participation (Hooghe and Marien 2013). Thus, if trustful citizens are more inclined to be committed in conventional modes of participation, distrustful individuals are more prone to resort to unconventional politics. The reminder of this deliverable studies if this is still the case and how this might differ across policy fields based on the ActEU focus group, survey and web scraped data.

2.3 Definitions, theoretical rationale and hypotheses on the interrelation of political trust and participation: participatory trust

As seen above, the overall research on political trust, mistrust and distrust provides no consensus on the question whether a certain degree of political distrust is healthy or unhealthy for representative democracy (see Morales 2017, p. 129). At the same time the role of participation within a democracy is shifting and with it the relationship of citizens to their system, institutions and actors (Butzlaff 2022). Non-representative, unmediated, sometimes rather contentious and more direct forms of participation and collective action have become increasingly attractive and accepted (Bosi and Zamponi 2015, p. 2020) – and underline that social compromise at the core of liberal representative democracies might be considered more and more problematic. From the perspective of the research on participation, engagement, and democratic values, it is highly interesting to see whether citizens (continue to) consider an engagement in ways and spaces close to the institutions of representative democracy as desirable or effective – especially when it comes to polarised issues like climate change or immigration – and if they do so, whether this means something for their overall trust in representative democracy, political institutions and processes as well as political actors. Or, on the other side, whether they decide for 'outsider strategies' which often (but not necessarily) are more contentious forms of participation and whether this matters for citizens' trust in representative democracy. This report is based on broad understanding of political participation which goes beyond the minimal definition by e.g. Brady (1999, p. 737) as "action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes" (1999, p. 737) or "activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba and Nie 1972, p. 2). We follow the most recent developments in the literature, which deliver a broader understanding of what political participation can be. For example, van Deth's explanation that "Political participation can be loosely defined as citizens' activities affecting politics. [...] The list of specimens of political participation is virtually endless and includes such divergent phenomena as voting, demonstrating and boycotting – but also guerrilla gardening, volunteering, flash mobs and even suicide protest. Usually, participation is considered to be an abstract concept (measured as a continuum) covering these specific modes of participation as manifestations or expressions (or positions on a continuum). [...] All these depictions – abstract concept, latent construct, continuum, repertoire – move beyond the analysis of a particular mode of political activity and focus on a more general or abstract idea of political participation" (van Deth 2014, p. 351). Therefore, political participation can be defined as "an abstract or general concept that covers voluntary activities by citizens usually related to government, politics or the state. In addition, these activities can be aimed at solving community problems or, in even more general terms, they can be 'attempts to alter systematic patterns of social behaviour' being 'devoted to influencing the collective life of the polity' or aiming to 'induce significant social reform'" (van Deth 2014, p. 353).

As shown above, research at the intersection of trust and participation emphasizes that different aspects of political participation on the demand side (e.g. path dependencies, nature of participation, types of participation, participation routines, feelings and identities) and supply side (e.g. participation options, access to participation, transparency and calls for participation) matter for citizens trust in representative democracy. Empirical findings from the ActEU Focus Group data (Berkowitz and Weissenbach 2024) support the theoretical assumption, that citizens' perception on how to get engaged in the democratic process and have access to process-knowledge on decision-making processes and participation options matters for whether they have "confidence in

regime institutions and approval of incumbent office-holders" (Norris 2017: 24) – which is our definition of trust.

On the other side the empirical rise of citizen participation options is not necessarily resulting in more democracy or citizen empowerment (Butzlaff 2020; Butzlaff et al. 2024) nor does it necessarily lead to higher satisfaction or trust in democratic institutions of representative democracy or to a significant increase of voter turnout or participation rates (Butzlaff and Messinger-Zimmer 2019). This highlights that political trust can take different forms. Here Berkowitz and Weissenbach (2024) distinguish between three different concepts of political trust: attitudinal trust, participatory trust and representational trust. In this report we focus on participatory trust as outlined next.

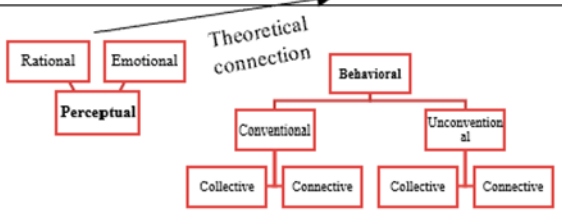
2.4 Participatory trust: capturing the behavioural side of trust (alongside attitudinal and representational trust)

In work package three of the ActEU project, specifically in this report, we focus on the relationship between political participation and trust and therefore on the participatory dimension in trust, which is *participation-related aspects that play a role for citizens' (dis)trust in representative democracy, political institutions and political actors.* Here we focus on the individual level and the fields of climate change and immigration.

Overall, we conceptualize participatory trust *rather as a process than as a status and we focus on the demand side of political participation*. This builds on the understanding highlighted by Butzlaff (2024), that path dependencies and participation experiences matter for whether and how citizens get engaged politically. Research shows that citizens who have been engaged politically in the past – be it in a conventional or unconventional participation form, be it through contentious action or not – tend to keep doing this (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010; Butzlaff 2024; Butzlaff et al. 2024). We also take into account the dense literature highlighting the influence of (inter-)individual determinants on political participation. Such a stance was summarized by Lehman et al. (2022): "In a majority of cases, individual political activists are self-starters [...]. Frequently, however, they become active because someone asked. [...] In an era of digital communications and social media, recruiting others to take part has become easier" (Lehman et al. 2022, p. 32). For instance, online social media, but also social networks – even those remaining informal, such as networks of friends or colleagues – facilitate the potentialities of mobilisation and commitment (Teorell 2003; Diani 2004).

Focusing on the demand side of political participation it is valuable to include Social theory authors (Beck et al. 1994; Baumann 2012; Sennett 1999 or Taylor 1991) which have pointed to two developments in terms of citizens' demands: Firstly, that demands for flexibility, individualization, temporal participation options and non-bindingness and demands for centralized political leadership might go hand in hand and secondly, notwithstanding increasing individualisation citizens might demand new forms of social collectives and belonging. Butzlaff (2024) investigates how different established party families create party linkage despite these contradictions and paradoxical demands. Earlier, the trend of declining trust in collective organization due to individualization has been addressed in party research (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel and Svåsand 2018; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein 2017; Mair 2013) at the same time, finding emerged that citizens might seek new collective forms of political participation.

Table 2.1 Conceptualization of participatory trust alongside attitudinal and representational trust

Trust Dimension	Theoretical conceptualization
Attitudinal Trust	
Participatory Trust	
Representational Trust	

(Source: ActEU)

Following our definition of participation outlined above we focus on a behavioural side of participation here defined as the actual engagement and involvement within a political or social system (van de Walle 2017, p. 121) and a perceptual side of participation, which comes close to what is been discussed as attitudes towards different forms of political participation in the state of the art. Our argument is that the behavioural side of participation ("which participation form do I actually make use of?" "Under which circumstances do I trust participation options within or outside the institutions of representative democracy?") is triggered by the perceptual side (e.g. rational and emotional perceptions, see in detail ActEU D3.4). On the behavioural side, we follow the classic distinction between conventional participation forms within the institutions of representative democracy and unconventional participation forms outside of institutions of representative democracy. In the chapters on the relationship between trust and participation in the fields of climate change and immigration we complement this distinction by adding the dimension of more collective action, connective action and contentious forms of political participation.

This approach complements a considerable body of literature focusing on the individual determinants of the legitimation and acceptability, i.e. attitudes towards different forms of political participation – less conventional forms or more contentious forms of political participation by citizens: for instance, among these factors, the respective effects of education and political interest were highlighted (Arbache 2014), as well as the dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Pajak-Patkowska et al. 2018), the degree of participation in civil society organizations and the lack of satisfaction with the government (Stockemer 2014), or even voters' ideological preferences and electoral choices (Memoli 2016). More particularly, the relationship between conventional and less conventional modes of political participation was studied in the above-mentioned works.

Additionally, the effect of (mis)trust was explored in many case studies: for example, mistrust tends to increase the possibilities of communal conflict in Sub-Sahara Africa (Petrova 2022). In the European setting, (mis)trust can be considered as a determinant of several political attitudes and behaviours, such as the vote for the far-right (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2023) or the support for European integration (Ejrnaes and Jensen 2019). In addition, mistrust towards the government

was also described as fuelling citizens' inclination to resort to less conventional and more confrontational forms of political participation (Bourne 2010), and to even favour permissive attitudes towards law-breaking behaviour (Marien and Hooghe 2011).

Concerning the influence of polarisation, the literature mostly dealt with its effects on the political frame. Indeed, polarisation was depicted as harming democracy (McCoy et al. 2018). More precisely, increasing polarisation tends to be associated with decreasing democratic accountability (Körösényi 2013). Independently from its effect on democracy, polarisation also influences some aspects of the political competition – such as thriving on party sorting, as it was described in the American case (Fiorina and Abrams 2008). However, the effect of polarisation on citizens' political attitudes and behaviours is less covered by the extant literature.

We bring these two elements of (1) *behavioural side of participation and (2) the perceptual side of participation together, which is defined as attitudes towards different forms of political participation*. Through this lens we aim to understand the relationship between trust in politics, polarisation effects as well as choices and attitudes towards different forms of political participation.

2.5 Research questions and hypotheses

Do we empirically find a.) an overall connection or interrelation between trust/decreasing trust and perceptual or behavioural participation patterns? And b.) does polarisation in the two fields of climate change and immigration affect participation choices and trust of citizens in representative democracy?

Based on the preceding discussion and introduction of the guiding concept of participatory trust these two questions are structuring our analysis in the following sections. We illustrate the theoretical rational of participatory trust based on the ActEU focus group data and explore our assumptions in the fields of climate change and immigration based on the ActEU web-scraped and survey data (on the methodological approach see chapter 4). We describe the relationships between trust and participation within the field of climate change and immigration on the individual level alongside the following hypotheses:

Along multiple hypotheses using different data sources and we focus on the overall relationship but also explore it in the specific case of two policy areas of climate change and immigration. Following the logic our first hypotheses is:

Hypothesis 1-a: At the individual level, a *low level of political trust* increases the likelihood of choosing *less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation*

Next based on the ActEU Focus group data this report explores the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1-b: At the individual level, the more decision-making in formal representative institutions is perceived as untransparent by citizens, the greater the likelihood of opting for forms of participation that are outside formal institutional channels of representative democracy.

Hypothesis 1-c: At the individual level, a low level of knowledge about procedures of political participation options in political institutions increases the likelihood of choosing participation options beyond formal institutions of representative democracy.

Then we look at the relationship between trust, polarisation and contentious forms of political participation along the two policy areas both in terms of choosing and acceptance of such contentious forms of participation:

Hypothesis 2-a: A high degree of polarisation on *climate change* strengthens the relationship between degree of political trust and likelihood of *choosing* less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation. This moderation effect is strengthened when the policy field of the treatment (climate change) matches one of the three most important issues mentioned by the respondent.

Hypothesis 2-b: A high degree of polarisation on *immigration* strengthens the relationship between degree of political trust and likelihood of *choosing* less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation. This moderation effect is strengthened when the policy field of the treatment (immigration) matches one of the three most important issues mentioned by the respondent.

Hypothesis 3-a: A high degree of polarisation on *climate change* strengthens the relationship between degree of political trust and *level of acceptability* towards protest actions. This moderation effect is strengthened when the policy field of the treatment (cl*imate change*) matches one of the three most important issues mentioned by the respondent.

Hypothesis 3-b: A high degree of polarisation on *immigration* strengthens the relationship between degree of political trust and l*evel of acceptability* towards protest actions. This moderation effect is strengthened when the policy field of the treatment (immigration) matches one of the three most important issues mentioned by the respondent.

3 Description of data and methods

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The next chapter outlines the data and methods used in this report. It first provides further insights into the focus group data already discussed in chapter two. It then briefly sketches how we use the European Social Survey (ESS). Then it describes in detail the design of the ActEU survey questionnaire and vignette survey experiment it includes. Finally, it discusses how we mobilisation the web-scraped emanating from the social media platform Twitter/X in this report.

3.1 Focus group data

3.1.1 Focus groups design and mixed methods design

As first phase of the exploratory sequential design of the ActEU project, a total of 16 focus groups were conducted in Czechia, France, Germany, and Greece each lasting 120 minutes. The country selection was primarily guided by ensuring representation across all geographical regions of the European Union. In each country, four focus groups with distinct compositions were organized, resulting in a total of 93 participants. Participants were assigned to groups of four to seven individuals. The discussions were conducted in cooperation with the market research institute IPSOS[1] and the participants received incentives for their participation depending on the country. To facilitate open discussions and create an environment in which all participants felt comfortable, the focus groups were designed to be homogeneous in terms of participants' knowledge and experience related to conceptual categories of attitudes and participation as well as in terms of social background and educational level. Simultaneously, groups were heterogenous in age, gender, and place of residence. Based on research on gender stereotypes indicating women having less speaking time in mixed groups (Karpowitz et al. 2012; Lee and McCabe 2021) one women group were incorporated in every country. This resulted in one group of 'disconnected' citizens characterized by political disinterest, no participation, and social marginalization, one 'average' group with mean levels of trust in the political system, without or with little political involvement and one 'committed' group which is actively involved in a) traditional institutions of representative democracy (e.g. parties) and/or b) in alternative modes of participation (e.g. demonstrations, protest, #activism) per country, as well as the women groups. Coding was done in a hand-coding[2] and abductive approach (Reichertz 2004)[3] with the analysis software MaxQDA (see Kuckartz 2014). Data has been analysed via a thematic qualitative content analysis. The analysis was carried out in an abductive and iterative way (Braun and Clarke 2006), applying a hand-coding approach (two coding phases each transcript) following a codebook that has been conceptualized by a Taskforce Focus Groups[4] consisting of ActEU country experts on Czechia, Greece, France and Germany as

[1] see on the implementation in cooperation with the institute IPSOS in the four countries, Report D.1.1 (Berkowitz/Weissenbach 2024, chapter 4)

[2] Coders: Ruth Berkowitz, Alexandros-Christos Gkotinakos, Jan Kovář, Max-Valentin Robert, Felix von Nostitz, Zdeněk Sychra

[3] That means an initial coding scheme based on theoretical considerations in connection to the different dimensions – attitudes, representation, participation – with a special focus on emotions as well as rationalities was developed. This was extended by further codes that were discovered by the different coders and then adopted for all transcripts

[4] Taskforce Focus Groups: Oscar Barberà, Ruth Berkowitz, Petr Burda, Daniela Braun, Oriane Calligaro, Henrik Serup Christensen, Liesa Döpcke, Alexandros-Christos Gkotinakos, Zixuan Gou, Axel Gougelet, Alex

well as researchers from the ActEU consortium with a background in the fields of participation, representation and attitudes. Visualization of the findings have been produced with the visualisation tools of the software programmes MaxQDA and ATLAS.ti.

This design allows us to better understand the process-related, informal, emotional aspects and the demand side of how citizens perceive themselves with regard to attitudinal trust, participatory trust and representational trust and overall to better understand the decline of citizens' approval and support of representative institutions, demands and changes regarding participatory patterns. Under what circumstances do they get engaged in institutionalized forms of political participation, under what circumstances do they lose trust in institutionalized forms of participation and turn to unconventional forms? When do citizens turn to more contentious forms of political participation? What alternative forms of engagement do they demand, hope for and consider attractive? Knowledge about these questions from the Focus Group data can directly be taken up for ActEU policy recommendations and the development of practical toolboxes on how to develop trust-inducing alternatives of political participation and tools to better explain the process of how citizens can concretely get engaged in the different institutions of the agenda-setting process and decision-making process in European Member States. Implementing such tools will lead to a higher extent of participatory trust.

3.1.2 How did we capture political trust – political participation – participatory trust?

In the focus group sessions participants first explored behavioural and perceptual aspects of political participation (engagement) by open, unsupported inquiry of forms of participation, then via image stimulus exercises of conventional, unconventional, collective, connective and more contentious participation, before in-depth inquiries (table 3.1) were made on various aspects of participation. In the group discussions participants worked out how they would like to participate and whether there is more reason (attitudes/purpose/value rationality) or affects (emotions) behind participation. The group discussion was encouraged by supporting questions, e.g. "what do the others think...?". Especially after the stimuli exercise the goal was to have as much discussion as possible.

Table 3.1 In-depth inquiries at the intersection of participation and trust

Relevance	How important and meaningful are these forms of participation? Reasons?
Efficacy	**In general**: To what extent do these forms of participation make a difference? At what political level? **Specifically**: now also with a regard to climate, immigration, equality (*ask one after the other*)
Legitimacy / Contentious action	What is okay, what is the limit?
Access and hurdles	Is there anything that deters you from participating in this way? If so, what is it?
Motivations	What do you think, how is it that people are now seeing these forms of political engagement? What role do special events play here (Corona, war, climate crisis, immigration, inflation ...) What would have to happen for you to be (more or less) involved, engaged?

The concepts discussed in chapter 2 structured the coding frame for the qualitative content analysis of the focus groups transcripts:

Table 3.2 Coding system Political Participation

Main Category	Subcategory and sub- subcategory			Definition / Coding rule
Participation	Perceptual			This subcategory includes statements that refer to the subjective experiences and feelings. Please code statements on how individuals perceive their participation options in representative democracy. These include rational and emotional aspects, for example fun, anger, disinterest, time constrains, solidarity, self-interest, efficacy etc. (See especially also cross lying codes below).
	Behavioural	Conventional	Collective	Please code statements concerning the behavioural aspects of traditional and established forms of engagement and involvement within a political or social system. It encompasses activities that are widely recognized and accepted as legitimate means of participating. We distinguish between collective and connective action. *Connective action* is characterized by the usage of digital technologies and social media platforms to mobilise and engage individuals around a common cause or issue (e.g. online petition). In contrast, *collective action* involves a strong organizational coordination of action (e.g. unions).
			Connective	
			Voting	This subcategory includes all statements that address the democratic process by which individuals elect their representatives.
			Party Membership	This subcategory includes all statements that address the participation in parties.
			Demonstration	This subcategory includes all statements in connection to collective actions in which individuals gather in a public space to express their opinions, concerns, or demands regarding a specific issue or cause.
			Financial	This subcategory includes statements related to financial participation (such as sponsorship, financial support to candidates, political parties or other political entities).
		Unconventional	Collective	This subcategory includes statements concerning the behavioural aspects of non-traditional forms of engagement and involvement within a political system. It encompasses more disruptive and also innovative forms of participation.
			Connective	

				We distinguish again between collective and connective action. Connective action is characterized by the usage of digital technologies and social media platforms to mobilise and engage individuals around a common cause or issue (e.g. #activism). In contrast, collective action involves a strong organizational coordination of action (social movements).
			Political consumerism	This subcategory involves all statements that refer to the practice of using consumer choices and economic behaviour as a means of expressing political values and exerting influence on social or political issues. It involves individuals making purchasing decisions based on their political beliefs, ethical considerations, or support for certain causes.
			#activism	This subcategory involves all statements that address a form of social and political engagement that utilizes social media platforms and online spaces to raise awareness, mobilise support, and advocate for change.
Codes connected to the dimension of participation Are the feelings or rationalities related to participation? The statements to be coded under the concrete feeling/ rationality and in the associated subcategory of participation.				
Rational Aspects	Time			This subcategory includes statements concerning time constrains or time restrictions. For example, in connection to building attitudes towards the political system or the politicians in the political system, the rational decision to participate and getting engaged in / with the political system based on personal time capacity.
	Political interest			This subcategory includes statements that shows the participants inclination, curiosity, or engagement in matters related to politics, governance, patterns of engagement or representatives.
	Disinterest			This subcategory includes statements related to a lack of engagement or indifference towards the discussed topics, the representatives in the political system or the rational decision to participate based on considerations in terms of disinterest in political issues.
	Solidarity			This subcategory includes statements that show support and unity with other groups of society. For example, in context of the rational decision to participate based on solidarity.
	Affectedness			This subcategory includes statements concerning a personal condition of being

		affected by something on the political sphere and its effect on a respondent. For example, to take the rational decision to participate based on being affected by a political decision.
	Awareness	This subcategory includes statements concerning the process of informing and educating individuals or the public about a particular issue, cause, or topic with the intention of increasing knowledge, understanding, and engagement to draw attention to important matters that might be overlooked or underrepresented. For example, in connection as reason for different participation pattern.
	Efficacy	This subcategory includes statements concerning the evaluation of the ability to produce the desired or intended result or outcome. For example, the rational decision to participate (to not participate) based on the direct affects associated with the specific form of participation.
	Lack of fit	This subcategory includes statements concerning the evaluation of the political spere based on the conformity with one's one views. For example, the rational decision to participate based on the personal sense of the representation of one's own views.
	Self-interest	This subcategory includes statements concerning expected positive outcomes for oneself. For example, in context of the rational decision to participate or the evaluation of representatives.
	Easy to use	This subcategory includes statements concerning the availability of for example information or forms of participation.
	Lack of public interest orientation	This subcategory includes statements for the wish or a missing promoting and safeguarding of the welfare, well-being, and rights of the general public.
	Dishonesty	This subcategory includes statements that shows the evaluation of dishonesty, lying, being bribable etc.
	Legality	This subcategory includes statements about the evaluation of being in accordance with the law. This could include statements regarding compliance with the set of participatory opportunities, or the legality of political action.
	Wish for tolerance	This subcategory includes statements expressing the desire or aspiration to foster a more inclusive and accepting society where people from diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives are treated with respect and understanding.

	Wish for equality		This subcategory includes statements expressing hope and longing for a world where all individuals are treated fairly, have equal opportunities, and are not discriminated against.
Emotional Aspects	Positive	Fun	This subcategory includes statements concerning the emotional aspects based on a positive and enjoyable assessment for example engagement in the political system.
		Sense of belonging / closeness	This subcategory includes statements concerning a feeling to be part of a bigger group or a feeling of emotional proximity. For example, feeling as part of a social movement or feeling an emotional proximity and connection to a politician.
		Satisfaction	This subcategory includes statements concerning a positive sensation for example, in connection to facets of representation or in connection to engagement in the political system.
	Negative	Fear	This subcategory includes statements concerning anxiety for negative consequences or negative development in society. For example, in context of deciding to participate or the evaluation of the political system.
		Pointlessness / Resignation	This subcategory includes statements concerning a feeling that nothing will change anyway. For example, the nonsense of joining a party, going to a demonstration or disapproval of the political system / politicians.
		Overstrain	This subcategory includes statements concerning a too high a demand when for example participating.
		Overwhelmed	This subcategory includes statements concerning too many possibilities / information / developments.
		Lack of the feeling of competence	This subcategory includes statements concerning a feeling of not being qualified. For example, to engage or to inform themselves about political issues or how to express themselves properly in the political and social spere under new social norms.
		Reaction	This subcategory includes statements indicating that the behaviour is to be seen as a response to circumstances. For example, a certain victim attitude on the part of the participant.
		Dissatisfaction	This subcategory includes statements concerning a negative sensation. For example, in connection to facets of representation, or the disapproval of the political system / politicians.

		Distance	This sub-category includes statements pointing to a sense of detachment, disillusionment, or alienation from the workings and mechanisms of the government and political institutions or politicians in the system.
		Disenchantment	This subcategory includes statements expressing a sense of disillusionment with the political process, the political elites, and the functioning of democracy.
	Sense of duty		This subcategory includes statements concerning thoughts about democratic obligation for everyone. For example, to take part in political processes.
	Prejudice	Gender-related	This subcategory includes statements concerning prejudgments, bias and evaluations about different groups of society based on specific aspects as gender, migration background etc.
		Migration related	
		Other stereotypes	

3.2 Use of the European Social Survey

For both policy areas the report relies on the European Social Survey (ESS) to identify patterns and trends of the relationships between political trust and political participation over time and across countries. We selected the ESS as it includes relevant questions relating to attitudes towards climate change and immigration, political participation and political trust at different levels. However, there are considerable differences in terms of the inclusion of items on attitudes towards the two policy areas. While questions on attitudes to immigration are included in 11 rounds of the ESS (2002-2023) corresponding questions for climate change only in three ways (2016, 2020 and 2023). Due to these differences each policy chapter provides a more detail discussion on how it used the ESS data before presenting its findings.

3.3 Design of the ActEU survey questionnaire

The ActEU questionnaire was developed using a combination of established survey instruments and original survey items. For collecting sociodemographic variables or attitudinal questions that are not central to the ActEU project, we adopted well-tested operationalizations from ongoing survey projects like the European Social Survey or similar studies. In contrast, we designed several item batteries and two survey experiments ourselves. All newly developed survey items were pretested internally within the project and, in some cases, were also tested in smaller pilot studies for external validation. Such a pilot study was for instance carried out for the trust and legitimacy item battery.

The questionnaire is structured as follows: all respondents begin with the same welcome text, which outlines the topic of the questionnaire, addresses data privacy, and indicates the estimated duration of the survey. This is followed by questions on sociodemographic variables. Th subsequent sections cover topics central to ActEU's research interests, including common questions on general political positions and detailed question batteries on migration, gender, and the environment – the three polarising topics identified by ActEU. This section is followed by questions on media usage, which are crucial for linking survey data with ActEU's web scraping efforts. Afterward, respondents are asked about various forms of political participation. Following

the political participation section, the questionnaire shifts focus to political trust, a core concept of the project. This section incorporates both well- established survey instruments and innovative item batteries developed based on insights from the ActEU focus groups. The questionnaire then addresses political representation and affective polarisation, particularly concerning gender, age, and education.

To conclude, the questionnaire includes two survey experiments: first, a vignette experiment exploring political participation by examining different forms and initiating actors; and second, a conjoint experiment focusing on various politician profiles. This structured approach ensures comprehensive data collection on key topics relevant to ActEU's research interests, facilitating a thorough analysis of political attitudes and behaviours within the European context.

3.4 Design of the ActEU vignette survey experiment

3.4.1 Theoretical overview

Core questions of the ActEU project examine the relation between political trust, political participation, issue focus, who mobilises into political action and the forms of political action. The vignette experiment examines the combined effect of them on the inclination to join political action, views of the acceptability of political action and expectations of responsiveness to such action.

The treatments are based on current scholarship on social movements and political participation that points to changing patterns of political action whereby political action mobilised by mainstream politicians is seen as less attractive due to political mistrust of politicians (e.g., Gulliver et al. 2023), citizens – especially youth – increasingly prefer self-organized or 'do-it-ourselves' forms of political participation (e.g., Pickard 2019), and celebrities and 'entertainers' can have considerable political clout in mobilising citizens into action (e.g., Nownes 2021, Towler et al. 2020, Lawrence and Boydstun 2017, Street 2004, 2012). Furthermore, citizens can resort to a wide range of forms of political action in the political participation repertoire, and they vary in terms of how costly they are, as well as in terms of how conventional/contentious they are. While some studies suggest that mistrust can lead to more contentious forms of political action (e.g. Gulliver et al. 2023, Ozduzen et al. 2023), other research suggests that two different types of publics join certain forms of moderately contentious forms of political action such as demonstrations – the 'disenchanted critics' and the 'confident critics' (Daphi et al. 2021).

The vignette experiment is designed to inform these areas of research in political science and sociology and to examine the interactions between political trust, polarisation around specific policy debates and political participation.

3.4.2 Presentation of the vignette experiment

The wording of the vignette experiment was jointly designed by the 'survey task force' of WP1 of the project ActEU formed by: Professor Daniela Braun (Saarland University), Senior Lecturer Henrik Serup Christensen (Åbo Academy), Professor Laura Morales (Sciences Po and CSIC), Dr Ann-Kathrin Reinl (EUI) and Dr Alexander Hartland (Saarland University).

The vignette experiment includes three randomized treatments that are all core themes for the ActEU project:

> Treatment 1: Policy focus: climate change, equality between men and women and the management of immigration.

Treatment 2: Mobilising actors: a group of ordinary citizens, the opposition (in parliament), and a celebrity.
Treatment 3: Form of political action: an online petition, a campaign to email MPs, a peaceful demonstration and an occupation of the parliament building.

The vignette experiment thereby adopts a 3 x 3 x 4 design, resulting in 36 different possible vignettes/conditions to which respondents can be confronted.

The outcomes of interest are presented to respondents on 0-100 'thermometer' slide scales:

1. Please indicate how likely it is that you would join this action? 0: extremely unlikely – 100: extremely likely

2. How acceptable do you think this action would be? 0: completely unacceptable - 100 completely acceptable

3. How likely do you think it is that decision-makers would listen to the concerns raised by the activists? 0: extremely unlikely – 100: extremely likely

Below we show how the vignette experiment was designed in English in the 'master' questionnaire by the researchers (coloured added here to highlight the relevant fragments that are randomized):

> Q49. Vignette: Political decision-makers often need to take controversial decisions where some groups in society disagree with their intentions. Imagine a situation where the parliament is considering a new measure concerning the policy on [*climate change / equality between men and women / the management of immigration*] that you disagree with.
>
> In reaction to that, [*a group of ordinary citizens / the opposition / a celebrity*] is organising [*an online petition / a campaign to email MPs / a peaceful demonstration / an occupation of the parliament building*] to show their dissatisfaction with the proposal.
>
> Please indicate how likely it is that you would join this action?
>
> Answer scale: 0-100 vertical slider scale: 0: extremely unlikely – 100: extremely likely
>
> How acceptable do you think this action would be?
>
> Answer scale: 0-100 vertical slider scale: 0: completely unacceptable - 100 completely acceptable
>
> How likely do you think it is that decision-makers would listen to the concerns raised by the activists?
>
> Answer scale: 0-100 vertical slider scale: 0: extremely unlikely – 100: extremely likely

3.4.3 Implementation of the vignette experiment in the survey

The online visualization and implementation of the vignette experiment were designed by IPSOS Germany and tested by the survey task force team of ActEU. The English language version was translated by the ActEU project partners into the respective country languages and cross-checked by other (native/proficient speaker) members of the international consortium. The exact dates of fieldwork for the online survey managed by IPSOS Germany are not yet known at the time of writing, but the survey was launched on April 15, 2024 and completed in on May 29, 2024.

The factorial vignette survey experiment embedded in the Horizon Europe project ActEU survey to 1,300 respondents in each of 10 EU countries (Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain) is included at the end of the questionnaire, along with a conjoint experiment described in: Christensen, Henrik S., Laura Morales, Janette Huttunen, and Luis Ramiro. 2024. "Politicians' Deceitful Behaviour, Climate Change Policy Positions, Ideological and

Personal Attributes: The ActEu Conjoint Survey Experiment on Citizens' Preferences for Politicians Moderated by Deceitful Behaviour." OSF. May 22. osf.io/7nket.

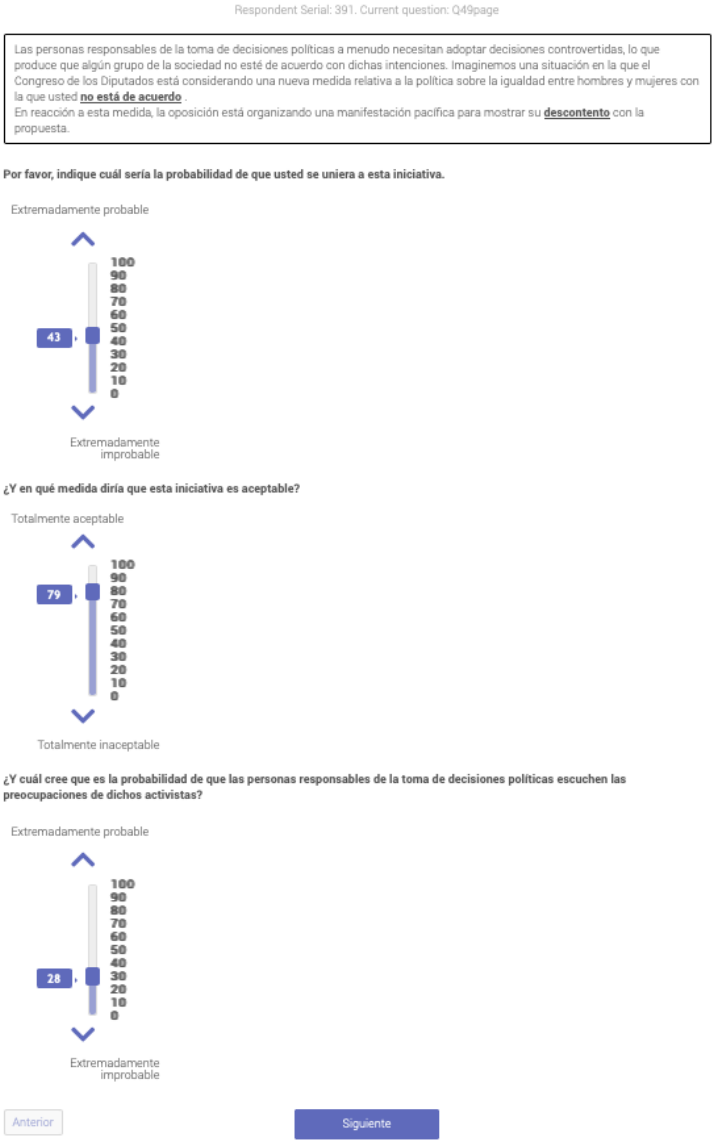
The vignette experiment is question 49 in the questionnaire, with the conjoint experiment being question 50. To avoid bias due to priming from the experiments, the order in which Q49 and Q50 are presented to respondents is randomized with equal probability, such that for approximately half of the 13,000 respondents Q49 will be presented first and for the other half Q50 (the conjoint experiment) will be presented first.

The vignette experiment was designed in English language as shown above but translated into the national languages of the 10 countries included in the ActEU survey. Hence, it has not been fielded in English in any of the countries.

The implementation of the vignette on the online questionnaire is as shown in Figure 1 (with an example from the Spanish version of the questionnaire for Spain). Respondents are presented with a box with the text of the vignette where the only words that are underlined are those emphasising that the respondent is hypothetically in disagreement with the policy proposal and that the goal of the political action is to express dissatisfaction with the proposal. The words that are randomized (the policy field, the mobilising actor and the form of political action) are not highlighted and the fact that they are being randomized is not apparent to the respondent. The actual name of the parliament (the lower chamber in bicameral systems) is provided instead of the generic term 'parliament' in several countries (e.g., Assemblée Nationale in France, Congreso de los Diputados in Spain, Camera dei Deputati in Italy, etc.) for immediate identification of the decision-making body.

Immediately below, respondents are shown the three questions with the 0-100 slider scales, which allow respondents to choose any integer number within the scale. Respondents must provide an answer to all three questions before they can move on to the next page.

Figure 3.1 Illustration of the visualization of the ActEU vignette survey experiment (Q49) on the IPSOS online survey visualization, for the Spanish sample



3.4.4 Sample sizes and power calculations

Sample sizes were determined at the grant application stage by the University of Saarland team based on funding constraints and without the involvement of the researchers filing this registration. The main rationale was financial. An expected sample size of 1,300 per country was affordable within the funding limitations, rendering a total of 13,000 expected respondents across the 10 countries.

In the absence of background information through pre-tests, power analysis calculations have been conducted *post hoc* with G*Power 3.1 (Mac version) for ANOVA[1] (fixed effects, special, main effects and interactions) with the following 'naïve' parameters:

- Effect size: 0.1 (small)
- Alpha error probability: 0.05
- Total sample size: 13,000
- Numerator degrees of freedom: 12 (Policy DF * Actor DF * Form DF = (3-1)*(3-1)*(4-1)=12)
- Number of groups: 36 (3*3*4)
- Power estimated ≥ 0.99

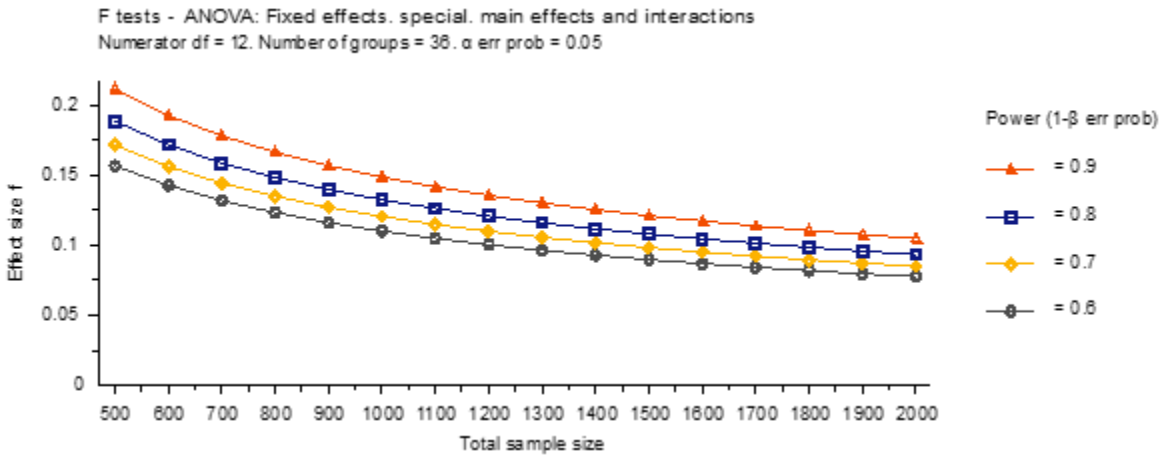
Hence, for the pooled sample of the 10 countries, the power of the experiment is very high even for small effects. Table 1 provides the power estimated for changes in only one of the above parameters, leaving the others constant:

Table 3.3 Power estimated with changes in one of the above parameters (cæteris paribus)

Parameter changed	Power estimated
Effect size à 0.05	0.986
Sample size à 1,300 (for single-country estimations)	0.64
Alpha error probability à 0.01	≥ 0.99

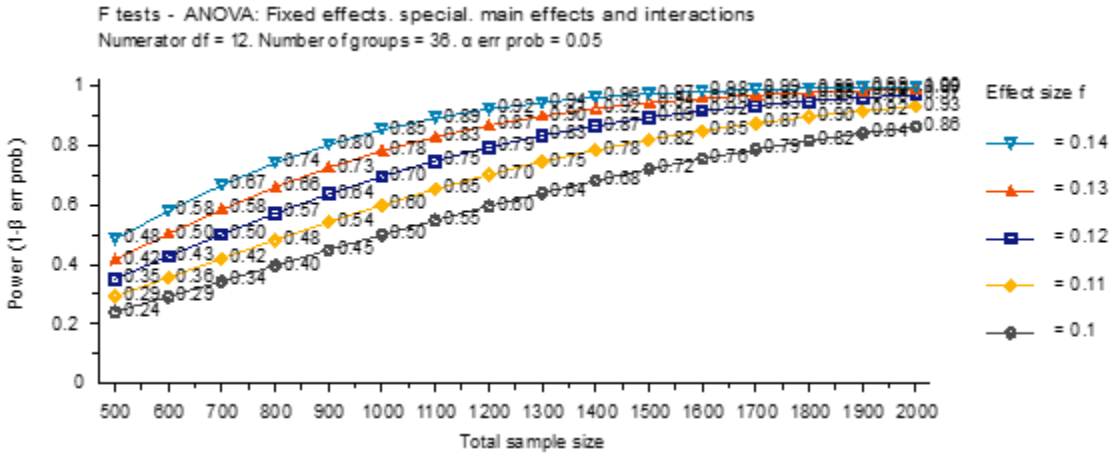
Moreover, Figure 2 plots the changes in power as a function of the size of the expected effect and sample size for an alpha error probability of 0.05. We see that for single-country analyses (n=1,300), although we can only detect effect sizes of 0.1 with fairly low power, we will be able to detect small effect sizes of about 0.13 with a power of 90%.

Figure 3.2 Detectable effect sizes as a function of sample size with different levels of power



Additionally, Figure 3 plots achieved power as a function of sample size with different levels of power. We see that, for very small effects (f=0.1), the power in single case studies (n=1.300) is low, but even for slightly larger effect sizes of 0.14, the effect size is satisfactory at 0.94.

Figure 3.3 Changes in power as a function of sample size with different effect sizes



In sum, the cross-country pooled sample size is very powerful for the detection of small-sized effects, but single-country analyses will be less powerful for an effect size of 0.1. Nevertheless, for an effect size of 0.12, the power provided by a sample of 1,300 will already be above commonly accepted thresholds of 0.80.

3.5 Web-scraped data

The web-scraped data mobilised here emanates from the social media platform *X* (formerly *Twitter*) and is divided between two sets of tweets respectively coming from two distinct categories of accounts. The first category – labelled as *seed* accounts – emanates from accounts belonging to the following actors: political actors (activists, governments, politicians and political parties) and other societal relevant actors (interest groups, journalists, news, unions and unionists). The second category – defined as *common users* – includes all the accounts emanating from citizens who cannot be classified as activists, politicians, journalists or unionists. These distinct datasets were indeed designed to deal with the interaction between the supply side and the demand side of European democracies. Besides, the data was collected from seed accounts and common users' in a set of diverse European countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, the UK, Italy and Poland. The data was collected from 6 June 2023 to 23 February 2024.

Three main topics were covered by the web-scraped data: gender, migration and climate change. Despite a high proportion of noise within the captured tweets, the available datasets allow us to focus on three salient and polarising issues in current European debates. In addition, several variables make it possible to elaborate on the interactions between political leading figures and European citizens by examining the relationships between seed accounts and common users' ones, through a variable – entitled "*reaction_reaction_type*" – delivering information on the reactive behaviour of common users' accounts towards seed ones (reacting, replying, quoting). Independently from these behaviour-focused observations, our web-scraped data also provides information related to the tweets' content itself, especially the position (positive, negative, neutral) on the three previously mentioned topics and the tone (positive, negative, neutral) used in the tweet, but also the reference to modes of political participation (conventional/institutional protest and non-conventional/non-institutional protests, as well as NGOs, political parties, trade unions and petitions) and to expressions of trust or distrust towards politics (characterization of the targeted actors as being honest/dishonest, competent/incompetent, public oriented/not public oriented in their decisions, or even as acting legally/illegally).

In this report we particular paid attention to (1) polarising trends of the online debate on the two policy issues, and (2) the online reactions from European citizens faced with calls for action written by political and social actors. In addition, we provide an overtime analyses on the use of a (dis)trustful rhetoric by European citizens. This mobilisation of web-scraped data would be therefore structured around the following questions:

- How frequently are the two policy areas mentioned on X/Twitter by European citizens and actors over time?
- What is the prevalent tone when these topics are discussed? Are they mentioned in an overall positive or negative tone? Is the dominant online discourse generally characterized by a positive or negative policy position towards climate change (ecologist or a climate sceptic stance) and immigration?
- Are the two policy areas a polarising topic? Is the online discussions on both issues characterised by an antagonization between users with positive or negative policy position? Do both sides interact in distinct spheres?

- Is the prevalent discourse emanating from tweets in both policy areas characterised by a predominance of trustful or distrustful stances?

Overall, this report addresses the relationship between trust and participation based on five different and complimentary data sources consisting of the European Social Survey (ESS) data, the ActEU focus group data, ActEU survey data including a vignette experiment and web scraped data.

4 Participatory patterns from the focus groups findings

Kristina Weissenbach (UDE), Louisa Parks (UNITN), Ruth Berkowitz (UDE)

4.1 Introduction

The Central aim of this report is to describe the relationships between political trust and political participation both conceptually and empirically.

More specifically, it focuses on the circumstances under which citizens are more likely to choose less conventional, which we operationalise as more contentious, forms of political participation, especially protest action, in the fields of climate change and immigration. The findings of the focus groups add to this research interest in three regards:

a) In the transcripts we observe trust-participation patterns across the groups in all countries. We find that the perceptual side and especially attitudes and emotions matter for participation behaviour, we observe an interplay here. For citizens across the countries investigated it is more important that political participation is perceived as having an effect on political decision-making (efficacy), than the form or type of participation (conventional, unconventional, less or more contentious). (see section 4.2)
b) The guiding research assumptions, that process-knowledge about participation options (hypothesis 1-c) and transparency about how participation efforts actually feed into the policymaking process (hypothesis 1-b) matter for the decision to participate and to trust political institutions and actors can be supported. However, no clear pattern emerges about whether this leads to a greater likelihood of opting for forms of participation that are outside formal institutional channels of representative democracy alongside our conceptualization between convention, unconventional, collective, connective or more or less contentious action. (See section 4.3)
c) We learn about citizens' acceptance of less or more contentious forms of political participation in the fields of climate change and immigration.
   Overall, we see that the topic of contentious forms of participation in the field of climate change (which has been prompted through a visual) triggered many discussions in the groups in Germany and Greece, and less in Czechia and France. We observe intra-group dynamics with regard to the acceptance of contentious forms (like protest or 'gluing on the ground') in the field of climate change. We see that unconventional and contentious forms of participation in Germany are less accepted by individuals who have been grouped as 'disengaged' and 'average' and more accepted by citizens of the 'committed' and 'women only' groups. In Greece a visual related to animal protection triggered narrations about how positive unconventional forms of action are at the local level, but also narrations about the necessity of individual responsibility and individual actions. Little discussion (despite prompting through visuals) and intra-group dynamics on the acceptance of contentious action in the field of climate change was recorded in Czechia, while in France the dominant discussions were not on collective action but on the responsibility of individual citizens for example through political consumerism.
   Overall, we see many discussions on the topic of immigration as a challenge, but hardly narrations on political participation or contentious action in the field of immigration. In the Greek average group, we observe intra-group dynamics which lead to narrations that strengthen the argument 'you get engaged if you are directly affected by migration' (e.g., in the personal life on the island). This narrative is then connected to participation through demonstrations, sea rescue and the work of NGOs. In the Czech case demonstrations and

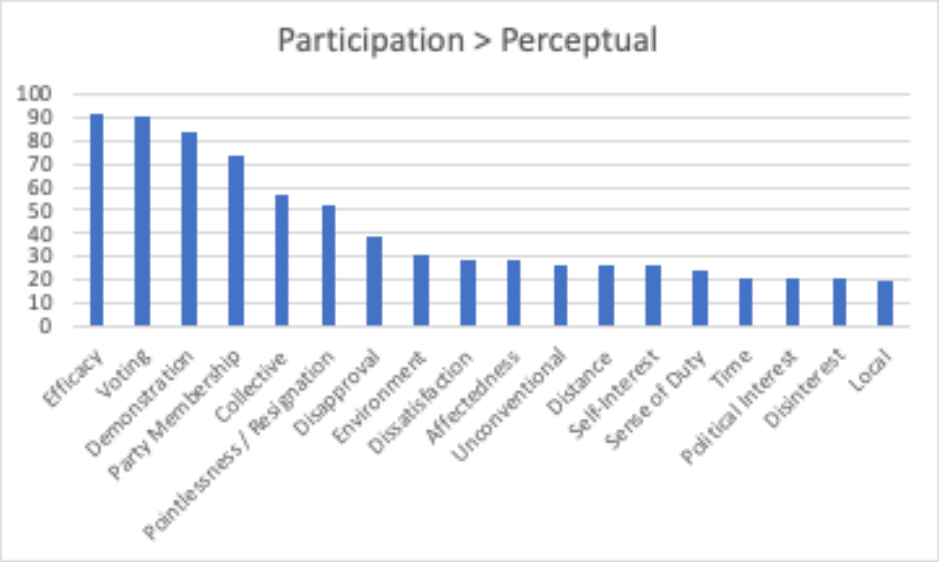
signing a petition against migration are mentioned as proper participation forms, but at the same time this leads to group discussions about whether "the government actually reacts to demonstrations" (We find this pattern in the average and disconnected group. (See section 4.4)

4.2 Trust-participation patterns: perceptual and behavioural patterns of participation

We observe trust-participation patterns in the transcripts across the different types of groups and in all four countries. We find that the perceptual side, and especially attitudes and emotions, matter for participation behaviour, and see an interplay at work here. For citizens across the countries investigated it is more important that political participation is understood as having an effect on political decision-making (efficacy), than the form of participation the action is actually carried out (conventional, unconventional, less or more contentious).

For section 4.2 the analyses for Czechia, France and Germany are included. The general codes marking sections of conversations as linked to attitudes, emotional aspects, participation, policy fields, rational aspects and representation are the most common in the coded focus group transcripts. Some show prominent patterns within those categories. **Participation is most frequently linked to perceptions**, and these perceptions are in turn linked to other ideas. **Figure 4.1** shows the most common co-occurrences coded alongside perception (with a cutoff point of 10).

Figure 4.1 Co-occurrence of codes with participation: perceptual across all focus groups



(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

The above figure (**figure 4.1**) shows the most common content codes for perceptions of participation in the whole of the sample (all group types in Czechia, France and Germany). They show that when speaking of participation, all focus group participants tend to talk about the efficacy of participation more than anything else, followed by types of participation – voting, demonstrations, and party membership.

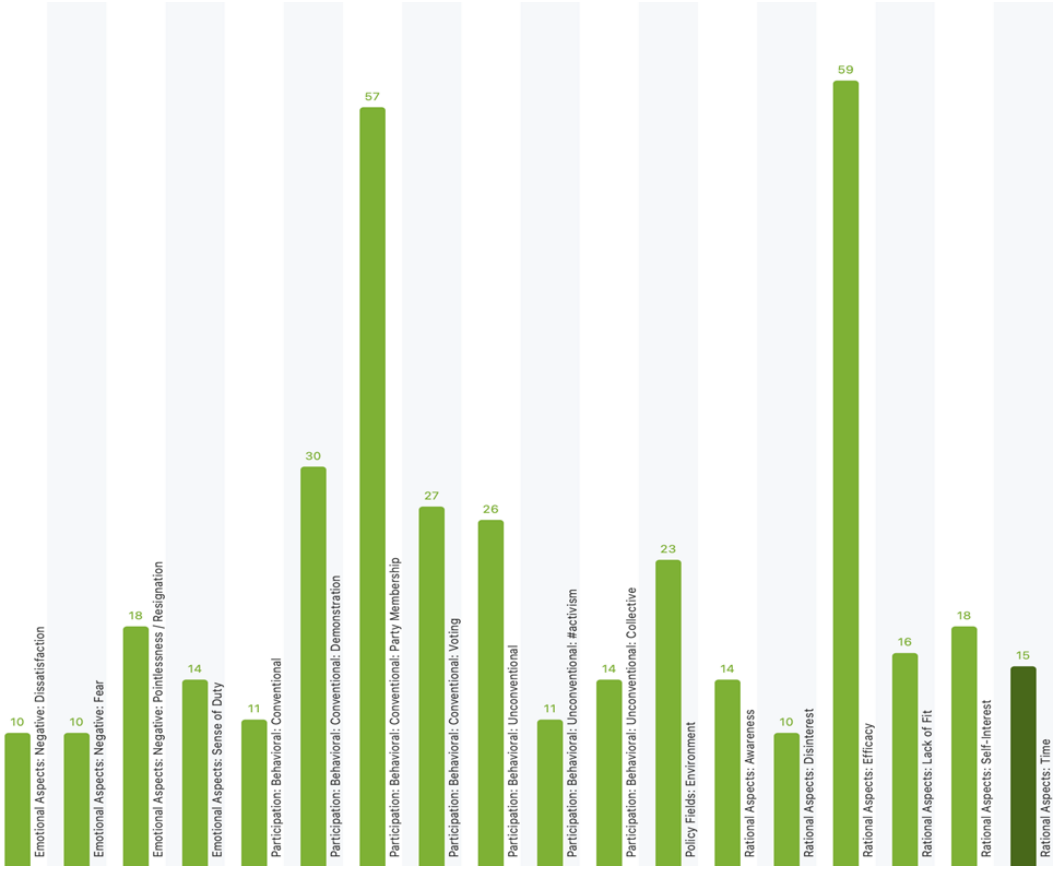
Table 4.1 Perceptual by Country

	Germany	Czechia	France
Perceptual	43,60%	23,60%	32,80%
SUM	43,60	23,65	32,76

(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

Across the different countries there is some variation in talk about perceptions. Germans reflect the most on their perceptions of participation, followed by France then Czechia. This suggests more preoccupation about political participation.

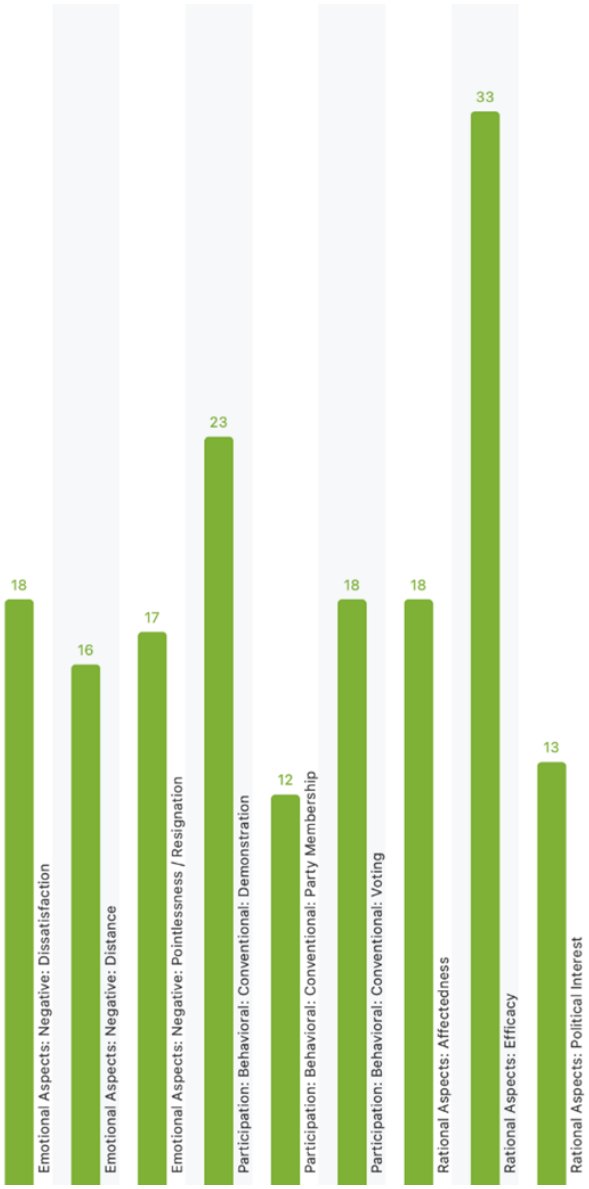
Figure 4.2 Co-occurrence of codes with 'participation - perceptual' in Germany focus groups (10 or more occurrences)



(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

When Germans focus group participants of all types share their perceptions of participation, their main theme of talk is efficacy: their trust in participation thus seems to rely more than anything else on how efficient they feel participation is. This is most often discussed with reference to party membership, but also with reference to demonstrations, voting and activism. Various emotions are linked to these, but mostly negative ones. German focus group members display the most variety in their views of participation, as well as a greater attention to rational factors compared to emotions (for a detailed discussion on triggers, emotions and motivations for political participation see ActEU D.3.4).

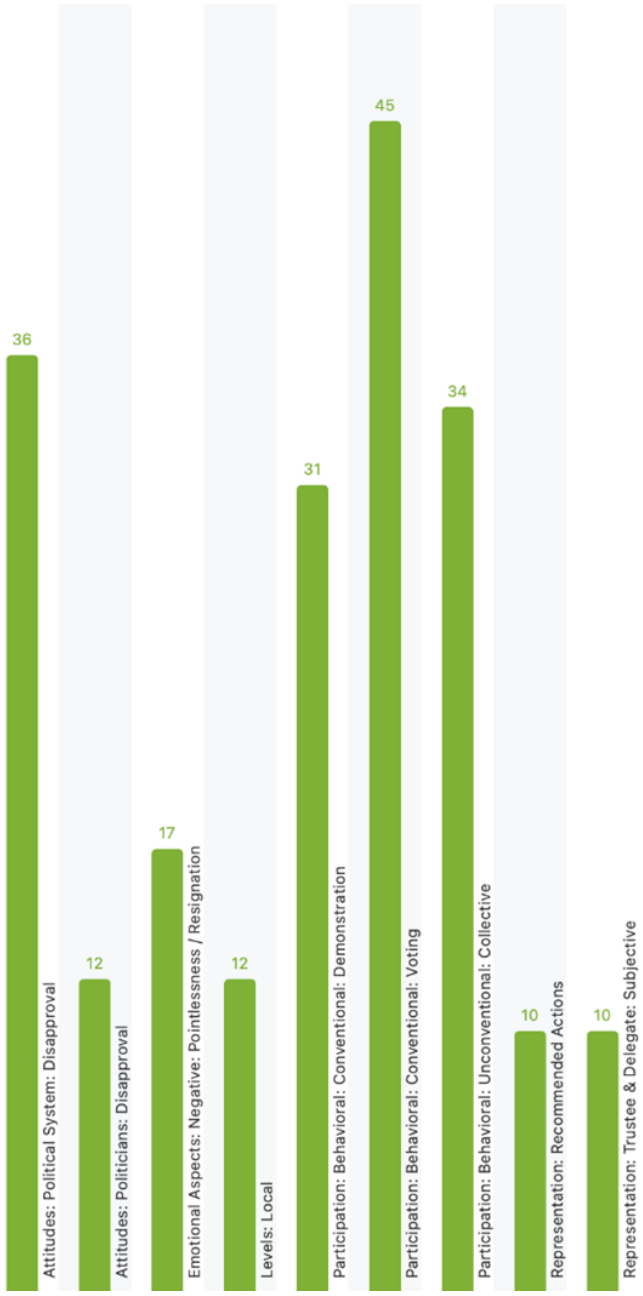
Figure 4.3 Co-occurrence of codes with 'participation - perceptual' in Czechia focus groups (10 or more occurrences)



(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

The **pattern on efficacy holds strong for Czechia**, **indicating that how efficient a type of participation is perceived to be is an important factor when discussing issues around trust**. Here the talk is more in reference to demonstrations, but also with reference to voting and political party membership. Emotional aspects also come more to the fore, and negative emotions around dissatisfaction, distance and pointlessness and resignation in particular. This suggests that in Czechia, trust in the efficacy of political participation of different types is not widespread.

Figure 4.4 Co-occurrence of codes with 'participation - perceptual' in France focus groups (10 or more occurrences)



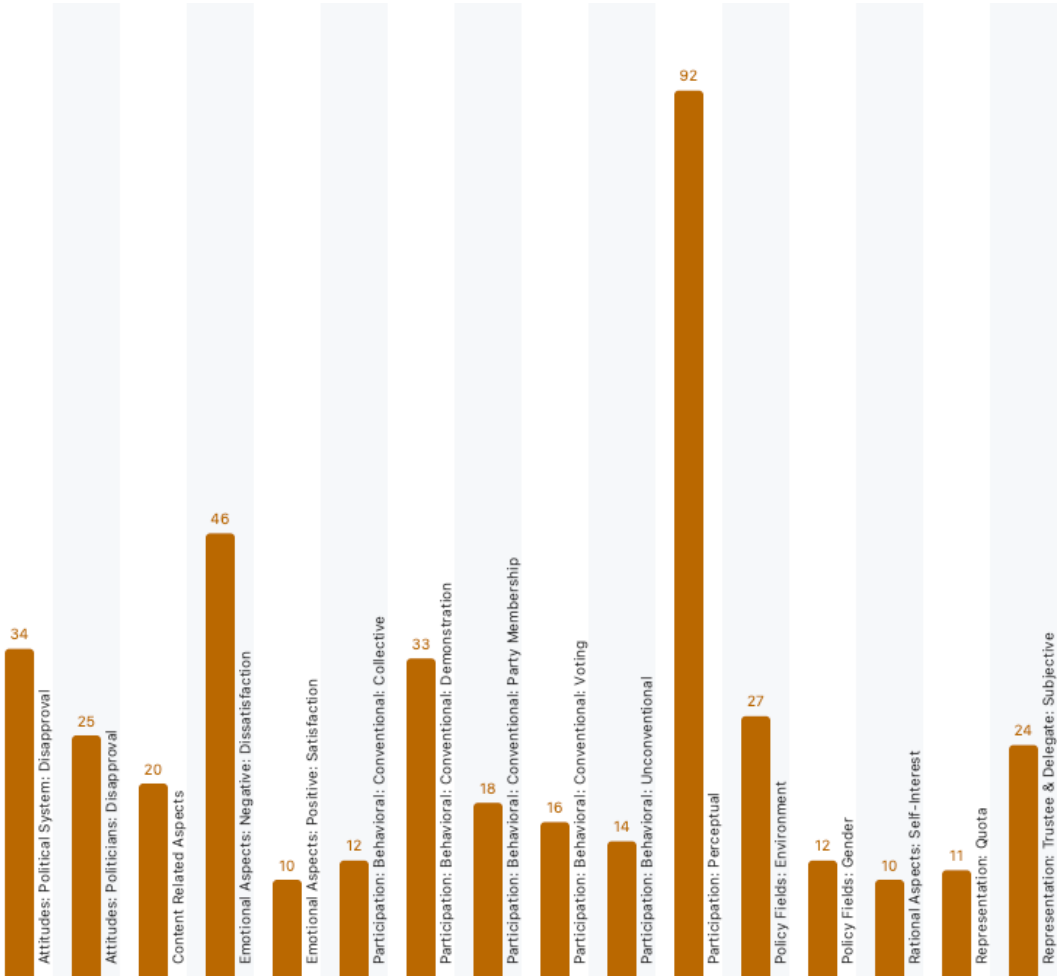
(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

In the French focus groups talk about perceptions of participation is not linked to efficacy – making France the outlier on this pattern. France is also an outlier because emotions do not come to the fore in discussions. The forms of participation most talked about are voting and unconventional collective action as well as conventional demonstrations. These are all accompanied by a predominant disapproval of the political system. This could well be linked to the political landscape in France at the time of the focus groups (elections on the national level).

Overall, participants in the ActEU focus group tend to talk about the efficacy of participation more than anything else when they discuss at the intersection of trust and participation, followed by

types of participation – voting, demonstrations, and party membership. Thus, their main concern is not how they participate but to what extent they feel these forms of participation make a difference. In the whole sample efficacy plays a key role, while patterns in how efficacy relates to other codes emerge as follows:

Figure 4.5 Co-occurrence of codes with efficacy for whole coder 1 sample (cut-off point 10)



(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

The strongest correlation, as already discussed, is with perceptions of participation. Other strong associations with efficacy of interest here are feelings of disapproval towards the political system and politicians, dissatisfaction, and participation in demonstrations (see D.3.4 for more detailed discussion). Efficacy thus appears once more to be a key rational calculation in distrust of systems and politicians and linked to talk about participation through demonstrations rather than more conventional means like voting. Therefore, while the perceptual side and especially attitudes and emotions matter for the behavioural side of participation, we observe an interplay between both.

4.3 Do process-knowledge and transparency matter for political trust?

In this section we develop individual level profiles, which show that process-knowledge about participation options (hypothesis 1c) and transparency about how participation efforts actually feed into the policymaking process (hypothesis 1b) matter for the decision (how) to participate and

whether to trust political institutions and actors. We find general support for this hypothesis, but no clear pattern about whether this knowledge is linked to a greater likelihood of opting for a certain form of participation – whether outside or inside formal institutional channels of representative democracy following our conceptualization between conventional, unconventional, collective, connective, or more or less contentious action. In this section we present analyses for Czechia, France, Germany, and Greece.

Table 4.2 Do process-knowledge and transparency of decision-making process matter for political trust? Evidence from whole coder 1 sample, individual level profiles.

Participant	Individual level profiles: Process-Knowledge/ Transparency	Quote
Disconnected Group in Germany, France, Czechia, Greece		
Germany GE_D_M2	(Lack of) Process-Knowledge on how party membership works and lack of transparency about how to make a contribution	GE_D_M2: It's hypothetical. I start from what I feel now and how I see the whole thing now - I would feel lost. As something useless that can't make a contribution. But just being there. I have signed - I may be a member. But I'm just a "nobody" - I have the image in my head that I'm being ordered to the booth and handing out election flyers. [with regard to party membership]
	No trust in politics	GE_D_M2: No trust in politics. The way the model is and the way the system works, it looks very corrupt and dishonest. This is not how it should and cannot work to solve problems or help the population.
	No trust in the basic law	GE_A_M2: That the Basic Law is pretty much being abolished more and more. For me, the Basic Law should be secured and not always circumvented with new laws. Now we have exceptions like Covid. Politicians don't inform themselves properly about the situation. They just make laws as they feel like it. And say "Ok, the Basic Law is no longer valid and then we can do whatever we want". Creeping for me Chinese conditions. Where the citizen becomes more and more incapable and more and more oppressed and at some point the government does what it wants. That just depresses me a lot. The whole Corona thing has depressed me. And I have absolutely no trust in the government any more.
	Distrust in politicians No Transparency	GE_A_M2: Trabbi comes to mind. A small, simple car that doesn't go very fast. Where you had to wait 20 years for it to be built. It's pretty rickety and has to be held together somehow because there was no replacement. That's how the politicians seem to me a bit. You always cling to the same mentality of politicians. They're all somewhere... so many quick fixes are made that they don't really inform themselves and they don't communicate clearly and transparently. Numbers are thrown around and there is no relation to what the numbers actually mean.
	Lack of Process-Knowledge and Transparency	GE_D_M2: I see it like GE_D_F4, actually. In the election campaign, there are always promises and promises and in the end, somehow nothing comes of it. Then, as soon as the election is over, everything is forgotten.
Germany GE_D_M1	Lack of Process-Knowledge and Transparency	GE_D_M1: I think the idea and the reality will be different. You're going to go in there very committed. I personally imagine I would go in committed and I think that's a shitload of work waiting for me. A lot of bureaucracy. And a lot of reading. A lot of writing. And your own ideas about what you're there for, you stand up for A or B - those come at the very end. A lot is also "How do we want to talk best?" "How can we present ourselves?" and very much - I think

		very much around that has to be done. I imagine it's super, super exhausting. And super nerve-wracking. [With regard to party membership]
	Lack of Transparency: No trust in linkage between citizens and government.	GE_A_M1: Basically, communication both within the population and from the government to the population is sometimes difficult.
	Lack of Transparency (with regard to lobbying)	GE_D_M1: I think the problem is... I don't know what's behind the façade, that's the big secret. But behind the façade - I think - there are interests that people may not want. There is a lot of lobbying. A lot of interests from other companies. From people who may be much more powerful than the politicians - who have much more money and much more power and influence.
Germany GE_D_F2	Lack of Transparency (with regard to the whole political system)	MODERATOR: What is the reason behind this? GE_D_F2: Because it is a corrupt world. Everything that is in this system, we have no control. No power. No influence over it. Nope.
Germany GE_D_F3	Lack of process-knowledge, especially coalition government	GE_D_F3 Nothing happens. Even if the politicians or individual politicians or parties have certain goals, they block each other to such an extent that nothing can be implemented.
Germany GE_D_F4	No trust (with regard to power of politicians)	GE_D_F4: It is not the population that is the focus. I understand that profit has to be made everywhere. We also have to preserve our country. But the population is not the focus at all. There are always lies and competition and "I'll destroy you because I'm better than you". We have to get another seat in the Bundestag because we are desperate to push through what we want and not what is best for the people.
	No trust in politicians	GE_D_F4: I also don't have confidence in something that is not relevant to me or that doesn't exist. Otherwise I would go and vote. And otherwise I would be a bit interested if I tried to build up a bit of trust. I just don't believe that these people really want to represent us. That's why I don't build up any trust at all.
France F_D_F4	No Process-Knowledge (with regard to political education); No Transparency	MODERATOR: And parliament, the government, the national assembly, what does that mean to you? F_D_M2: all negative. F_D_F4: I don't get it, I don't know who's who. F_D_F2: It's too complicated. Apart from the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and all the rest, if we don't take an interest and if we're not given the educational resources to find out how things work, we're quickly lost, we don't know who does what, who to talk to, how things work, who governs whom... The police and the gendarmerie are the same, we don't

France F_D_F2	Lack of Knowledge (with regard to police, military, government, parliament) Distrust in the political system	know, one of them is the military etc. Finally, at some point, we get lost, so we don't take an interest. F_D_F1: There are too many layers, like a millefeuille. MODERATOR: in positive terms, what should this institution be? F_D_F3: decisions to help people. F_D_F1: It's a counterweight to the government that can help moderate things. F_D_F4: I'm one of those people who don't know what the National Assembly is for.
France F_D_F1	Lack of Knowledge (with regard to police, military, government, parliament) Distrust in the political system	F_D_M1: Ideally, we should all be part of it, it would be the basis for everything, it would be where we would draw up all the country's policies. There should be 66 million of us inside. F_D_F2: It should be a symbol in the same way as the White House is in the United States. But because of the lack of interest, people don't know what goes on there.
France F_D_F4	Lack of Transparency Distrust in the media Overall no trust	F_D_F4: I don't listen to the news any more. I read very briefly what's happening on the networks, I disconnect because for me, everything is a lie, everything is manipulation, everything is designed to take us to one place to pass things on to the other side. Politically, I don't trust anything any more.
France F_D_F3	Distrust in the media	F_D_F3: It's the same for me, I don't like the news at all. My partner spends a lot of time watching it, and it's a bit of a conflict between us because I'm not interested at all. It's a lie. When the covid episode happened, it was thrown in our faces and in the end we realised it wasn't that serious.
Greece GR_D_F3	Transparency	GR_D_F3: I think the system is ready to handle these issues. It just doesn't want to. It's so self-interested that it doesn't want to manage it. That is what I believe!
Greece GR_D_F1	Transparency	GR_D_F1: I agree with GR_D_F3. I believe we have the means and we can find a way to manage them, they just don't want to for their own reasons. In other words, this is deliberately done in some way.
Greece GR_D_F2		GR_D_F2: I didn't say "unready." I said "joke"! Let me clarify.
	Distrust in politicians	GR_D_F2: It is not a matter of love of homeland. The problem is that all these people choose to do something in order to benefit themselves. When we get to a point where we stop this thing, then it will make sense to deal with all this. That is my opinion. They don't want us to achieve anything.
Czechia C_D_M1	Lack of Transparency about how participation feeds into political process. Distrust in voting	C_D_M1: you don't need to know them. I stopped voting 4 years ago. It seems to me that I've gotten passionate about something, seen the passion, and it's always disappointed me so extremely that now I think it doesn't matter, we have to fight for ourselves. Trust and respect zero.
	Lack of Transparency and Process-Knowledge	C_D_M1: I don't believe because we are going from extreme to extreme. We are solving everything and nothing. The war in Ukraine, so help always makes sense. However, I don't know why the help should be in the form of sending weapons there. That's the extreme we're going to. It's unnecessary. We've got our priorities wrong from the ground up.

Czechia C_D_F4	Lack of process-knowledge	C_D_F4: departments argue about money and then don't spend it efficiently. They spent money on digital, but you still have to go to the office. And nobody is responsible for the money going to waste.
	Lack of Knowledge	C_D_F4: what bothers me is the chaos and the bouncing back and forth and nothing getting done. Everyone should manage their work like they manage their home. That is how the state should manage. We can't live on debt.
	No trust in the political process	C_D_F4: they will betray the voters. It doesn't matter what party it is. They will betray us by making a deal. Whoever wins is not even in government.
Average Group Germany, France, Czechia, Greece		
Germany GE_A_F3	Lack of Process-Knowledge	GE_A_F3: Yes, I see it the same way. Nothing appeals to me there either. I know too little about it to get involved. I would have to read up a lot - and I don't feel like doing that.
Germany GE_A_F1	Transparency (with regard to party membership)	GE_A_F1: Good question - more transparency. If you don't just talk about things superficially. Or many things are not implemented or it takes ages until something happens. I have often been approached by parties, by people who were on the street, who wanted me. But I don't know exactly. [with regard to party membership]
	No trust in politicians	GE_A_F1: Because somehow it's not about the welfare of all people. It's always about their own advantages. And I can't do anything with that. Zero trust there.
Germany GE_A_F2	No Transparency/ Lack of Process-knowledge	GE_A_F2: One or two people here said earlier that the system is incredibly sluggish. It takes an incredibly long time. There are very, very long discussions and yet no bills are introduced, because one of them is not... Just when we were asked about climate change, we don't have 25 years to discuss it. Something has to happen. 20 years of the CDU - we haven't made much progress.
Czechia C_A_M3	Transparency Lack of process-knowledge	C_A_M3: they come, they talk and in the process they modify it 10 times. The solution is nowhere to be found, then the details are missing and when it's bad they point to the previous government and that they caused it and these guys have to fix it.
Czechia C_A_F3	Lack of Knowledge (with regard to EU)	C_A_F3: dependence on the EU and neighbouring states. We are not an independent state, we always have to obey someone.
	Knowledge	C_A_F3: they represent primarily the interests of the EU, the US and Israel. Certainly not the interests of Czech citizens.
Czechia C_A_M4	Lack of process-knowledge and transparency	C_A_M4: those foreign humanitarian aids are super fast, but domestically it's failing and taking an awfully long time. It takes half a year to apply for a pension. That's the exact opposite of foreign help. But it's good that there was help in Turkey in 2 days. Domestically, it's lagging behind.
France F_A_F2	Transparency	F_A_F2: We're not heard enough, listened enough as a part of the people. We are ignored.
France F_A_M2	Transparency	F_A_M2: We don't have a good image of the debates, which are sometimes really low-key and not worthy of a parliament.
Committed Group in Germany, France, Czechia, Greece		
Greece GR_C_M2	No trust in politics; (with regard to political communication)	GR_C_M2: Right now politics in Greece is a bit confused. I don't think there is politics. I think politics follows the situation, which seems to be the case throughout the country. There is a deterioration of the entire politics chapter. MODERATOR: So we are talking about a crisis of politics, if I understand correctly. GR_C_M2: Politics has become too communicative now. And I'm not just talking about our own country. What I see both outside and in all countries is unimaginable political communication.

Greece GR_C_F1	Transparency	MODERATOR: So all levels of administration are competent, but as far as I understand it, their power are not exercised, is it? GR_C_F1: Yes. I do not see anything happening at the moment.
France F_C_F1	No trust in the president	F_C_F1: at the moment, things aren't working very well - it's the president who decides everything, all on his own.
	Lack of Knowledge	F_C_M2: It would be great if there were peace in the world, but that's not going to happen. I don't see why France is getting involved in this conflict. F_C_F1: It's nothing to do with us.
France F_C_M2	Lack of process-knowledge; Lack of transparency.	F_C_M2: There are laws which are passed, but it takes so long for them to be implemented! And it's not at all representative of the people's vote!
	Lack of process-knowledge and transparency	F_C_M2: Not at all. The MP for my constituency, I know her. But I never see her! I could try to see her, I know what she does, I see that she's present at the National Assembly, but I'm not sure that I could go and see her to do something. Then we know that when they get there they are under pressure from the group chairmen to vote. Some come in and don't even know what to vote for!
	Transparency	F_C_M2: No. I followed a candidate's campaign and I took notice of the exchanges that had the elected representatives with the people. They can guarantee things: a city stadium, a swimming pool... but when they want to finance the swimming pool, they'll look at what they can do, but they'll need help from the department, the region and the state. And then the local mandate comes to an end if it isn't followed through. Elected politicians come up with big programmes, but then, they don't say how they're going to finance them.
	Knowledge	F_C_M2: It would be great if there were peace in the world, but that's not going to happen. I don't see why France is getting involved in this conflict.
		F_C_M2: I condemn Macron's statements on the war in general. It's all very well for Europe to deal with that, but if France were to deal with what's happening on its own territory, that would be a good thing.
Germany GE_F_F4	Lack of Transparency (with regard to the different levels differently)	GE_F_F4: It depends on the level you are at. If I want the Bundestag - that won't happen. But if I say I'll go to the district committee and get elected, that's realistic. And then you can still make a difference in your neighbourhood. I don't know - convert a car park into a bicycle park. I think that's realistic. The big one is too far up and so diffuse. As an individual, I'm also intimidated by it.
	Lack of Transparency (with regard to party membership)	M: GE_F_F4 - I'll come back to your question, you wanted to think about why you are not yet committed. How is it with you? GE_F_F4: Thought. TONE IS BAD 1:03:05. Friend of mine is relatively... with the youth. (NOT UNDERSTOOD) 1:03:07... on a higher level... It does make a difference which gender you are. She also gets misogynistic... not directly hate, but more headwind than she would get if she were a man. And second point, I think I like to be impartial. If I join a party now.... well, no party can fully represent my values. But I would be afraid that I would have to compromise. And I would be afraid that I represent something that is not really me. I have a lot of overlap with the Greens. And of the 6 big parties, that would be the one I would associate myself with the most. But there are also issues within the Greens where I say I can't represent that. And sure, you could maybe change things or talk about things and discuss them and so on. But there is such a barrier to entry. That's why I distance myself by not going at all. Party is such a big thing. It's hard for me to see myself in it.
Germany GE_F_F1	Lack of transparency (with regard to health system)	GE_F_F1: Not authentic. Because a lot is said in any case, but implementation is quite lacking in many areas. The health system, for example. Where it was said "There are more specialist appointments and so on" and if you are really ill, then you look stupid. Or with the citizen's income, for example, where it

		was said that there would be more. Well, it's 50 euros more, but that doesn't even compensate for the inflation rate. Things like that - not authentic for me at all.
	Lack of transparency	GE_F_F1: Then I would say a big cat - because the bureaucracy is not so simple in this country and they all compare each other. What one hand doesn't see, the other leaves behind. There is a lot of ambiguity. One blames it a little on the other.
Germany GE_F_F2	Both?	GE_F_F2: Everyone blames the other. Yes, I think so - one blames it on the other. How much they argued about that ridiculous ticket - the 49 euro ticket. These are such little things, that's where it starts
Germany GE_F_F5	Lack of process-knowledge	GE_F_F5: I would have two main problems: Firstly, I wouldn't know which party to go to. Because I don't see anything there that represents me concretely. And the second is that I don't have the talents you need. I hate committee meetings. I hate long discussions. I kind of try to use my knowledge and what I'm good at as much as I can and do in my job. Don't have the skills it takes to make a difference politically.
	Lack of process-knowledge and transparency	On some law or other why it can't be done. So there's a lot of blocking from above. Also topics like renewable energy or so on. Now it's over-regulated whether you can hang a stupid solar cell on your balcony or not. I see a lot of slowing down in terms of effectiveness.
Czechia C_F_F1	Lack of Transparency	C_F_F1: To me when I do get some information regarding politics it's just from a meme, so I would say it's not a 100% good representation. Anyway, I did some research on opinions before the election, and I was able to get an overview and form an opinion on my own, but I felt like once Petr Pavel was elected, everything went quiet and I just don't really have an overview at the moment, which I think is wrong.
Czechia C_F_F4	Distrust in political institutions	C_F_F4: I think the political institutions lack efficiency, they don't have that quality or performance to cost ratio, it's not there. A lot gets crammed in, they take an awfully long time and really little comes out of it. Of course, it's also about what Verča said, it's also about the fact that the people there change, somebody makes a deal and then maybe they can't get it done. But of course, sometimes it's also about the fact that the apparatus is really big. I can see it in some laws that have not been reissued for 20 years and are just waiting. For example, in the social sector, we already had a big reform of the social law promised this year, it was already in I don't know how many readings, it looked like it would be, and now a new minister has come in, the holy spirit has enlightened him, and it won't happen again. We've got a vision again, maybe in '25. So I said, I hope by the time I retire, this will finally be sorted out. And I've been listening for the last 15 years, it doesn't matter who's sitting there.
		C_F_F4: It seems to me that they talk an awful lot and do very little, like in general and not only about Ukraine. But honestly, to put on a vest and go somewhere and take a picture and say „we support you", like fine, but honestly what effect does that have? I don't get it. It's got to be a security risk, it's got to cost an awful lot of money, there's an awful lot of preparation involved, there's an awful lot of people's lives hanging in the balance, when somebody's involved. And for what? To take one picture with Zelensky? I don't buy that. But of course some people can take it as a media reference. There are some politicians who just don't go there once, of course. But I don't know, I would maybe choose different sector for it, I don't know why ministers and the prime minister should go there, after all it's a military issue, so I would leave it to the soldiers. We pay a fairly high percentage of our taxes and GDP for the military here. I'm from a military town and I believe we have the experts in the army to deal with a lot of these things.
France F_F_F6	Lack of Transparency and Knowledge	F_F_F6: I feel concerned because of my age. We are made more aware: us, the students, the 18-25 age group. They talk to us about it but I don't know what the impact is, I don't know how to do, they make us do little things: we don't see the impact. We don't feel it.

	Lack of Knowledge	F_F_F6: And everything goes slowly. Everything is slow, and there are things which are not necessary that go very fast. For example, the war in Ukraine. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have helped, but we were able to release money very quickly to help the country, we were able to do a lot of things, but we our country, we saw it clearly during the demonstrations for pension reform, or even the Yellow Vests that have been there since 2018, 2019, they took a long time to listen to us, even today they don't listen to us and nothing has been released for certain things, whereas the other countries have our help. It's diplomatic, OK, but in France we're having trouble getting our heads above water.
	Lack of Transparency (with regard to National Assembly)	F_F_F6: No. For me it's a place where there's wheeling and dealing, it's discussed, but in the end it's voted on randomly at 3am in the Senate. As far as I'm concerned, they put us to sleep, at the National Assembly.
	Lack of Transparency	They didn't explain it to me, like some programs: they didn't explain to me what they were. They're a long way from youth.
France F_F_F4	Lack of Transparency	F_F_F4: Yes... But... We set up a ministry for this or that, but after that these are subjects that take time. There is very little communication about what has or hasn't been achieved. Things have undeniably been put in place, but on a day-to-day basis there are always problems.
	Lack of Transparency	F_F_F4: When you see groups like Total making increasingly absurd strategic and economic decisions and doing nothing about it, you feel like you're being taken for a fool, and in addition, they are weaving everything. He says it's important, he takes part in IPCC summits, and for what? What is the result? Nothing.
France F_F_F3	Lack of Transparency	F_F_F3: I get the impression that they talk to each other a lot and end up making a decision that has already been announced long before, or without taking other people's opinions into consideration.
	Not trust in the National Assembly	F_F_F3: The National Assembly, I get the impression that they don't realise what they've had to do to get here. They go to the National Assembly as if they were going to a Tupperware meeting or with buddies, but not really to defend and be there for the French people.
France F_F_F1	Lack of knowledge	F_F_F1: I agree. It goes back to the idea of meaning that F_F_F4 was talking about. We commission 250-page reports on a given theme, which is long, costly, requires experts to work on it for months on end, then it arrives at the Ministry, is studied and in the end it's not received. We don't look at things through the same glasses.
	Lack of Transparency	F_F_F1: a decision-making body for all the major issues facing the country, but I sense something very closed. These barriers in front of it, there, I've never seen.
	Lack of Transparency	F_F_F1: A proof of their ineffectiveness that I have, it's that they identify needs in the area, and they provide responses that don't meet those needs. Any normally constituted citizen, if you put yourself in the position of a mother, father or sister, if my child is hungry, I'm not going to go and change his nappy, I'm going to give him something to eat. Them, they did not understand that, I think. They come up with answers that don't meet people's needs.

(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

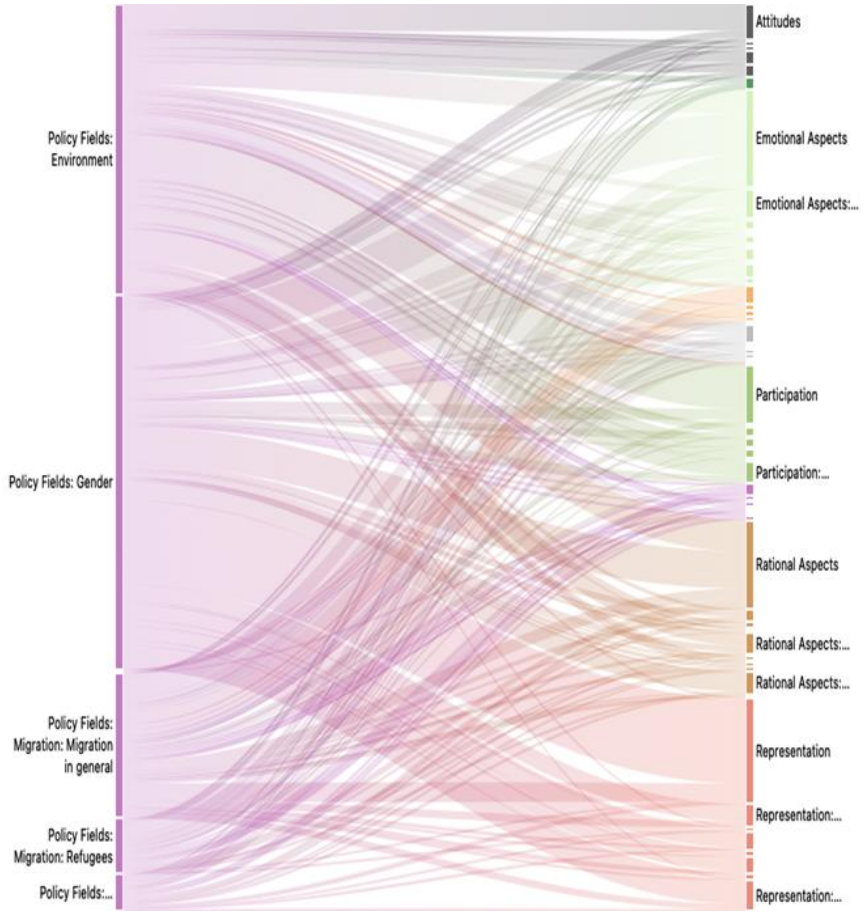
4.4 The relationship between trust and participation in the fields of climate change and immigration: Acceptance of different participation forms

Under which circumstances do citizens (not) accept more contentious forms of political participation in the fields of climate change and immigration?

Overall, we see that the topic of contentious forms of participation in the field of climate change (prompted through a visual) triggered extensive discussions in the groups in Germany and Greece and less in Czechia and France. We observe intra-group dynamics with regard to the acceptance of contentious forms (like protest or 'gluing to the ground') in the field of climate change. We see that unconventional and contentious forms of participation in Germany are less accepted by individuals who have been grouped as 'disengaged' and 'average', and more accepted by citizens in the 'committed' and 'women only' groups. In Greece, a visual related to animal protection triggered narrations about how positive unconventional forms of action are on the local level, but also narrations about the necessity of individual responsibility and individual actions. There was little discussion (despite prompting through visuals) or intra-group dynamics around the acceptance of contentious action in the field of climate change in Czechia, while in France the dominant discussions are not on collective action but on the responsibility of individual citizens for example through political consumerism.

Overall, we see many discussions on the topic of immigration as challenge, but little narrations on political participation or contentious action in the field of immigration. This is supported by the distribution of codes by policy fields (figure 4.6), where we see participation codes linked more to the field of climate change than immigration. In the Greek average group, we observe intra-group dynamics which lead to narrations that strengthen the argument 'you get engaged if you are directly affected by migration' (e.g., in the personal life on the island). This narrative is then connected to the participation forms demonstration, sea rescue and the work of NGOs. In the Czech case demonstrations and signing a petition against migration are mentioned as proper participation forms, but at the same time this leads to group discussions about whether "the government actually reacts to demonstrations" (This pattern appears in the average and disconnected group. For section 4.4 the analyses for the countries Czechia, France and Germany are included.

Figure 4.6 Distribution of codes by policy fields



(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

Overall, we see intra-group dynamics and narrations on contentious forms of participation in the field of climate change in all German group settings, in the Greek average and disconnected groups, in the Czech disconnected group, and the French average group.

Regarding immigration, no narrations specifically about contentious forms of participation took place in the German and French group settings, but these did occur in the Greek and Czech average groups.

In the following (see table 4.3) we provide an **overview of anchor examples from the focus group data on individual acceptance patterns for more contentious forms of participation in the fields of climate change and immigration,** sorted by groups and countries:

Table 4.3 Acceptance-Patterns of contentious forms of participation in the policy fields climate change and immigration

Climate Change	
Acceptance-Pattern German Average Group	Rejection of more contentious forms of political participation, especially "climate activists who glue themselves to roads" Reasoning: what does it achieve, and what does it draw attention to? Other forms of unconventional participation are certainly supported: demonstrations, graffiti
GE_A_F1: They are all political actions. On the right with the person sitting on the ground. They are really active and are mostly people my age or younger. They are concerned with climate change and want to set an example. When you see documentaries like this, the citizens react very angrily because they have to go to work or somewhere. Once there was a woman who was pregnant and had to go to hospital and there were these people sitting on the floor. That's not so great. But I still think it's important that people who are so young generally set an example GE_A_M2: I see Go Vegan like this - you don't know where it's written. Could be slate from a restaurant - could be anywhere. I already see it politically. Because I said earlier that the current meat consumption or how meat is produced is ecologically unsustainable in the long run. It's meant to draw attention, I think. The way they're drawing attention to it at the demonstration. Then I would rather say the climate stickers are the wrong approach. Because they only arouse anger instead of making a difference. And a "Go Vegan" - you can walk by and think about what's behind it - that's more catchy for me. And Go-Vegan - I'll go along with that. Spray-painting is OK, we've spray-painted worse things on our houses that you can't even read anymore.... and at least that's still a message. GE_A_M1: To come back to it, I already said at the beginning that I don't have a car and that it doesn't directly affect me. But I don't think the climate stickers' form of protest is aimed at getting people to stop driving. It's also said a lot as criticism, the cars then stand in traffic jams with the engine running and additional CO2 is emitted. It's much more about causing a stir in the public. And on the topic of climate change and not now specifically on the banning of cars or whatever... the question with such things is always "how much do they actually draw attention to the actual issue" and "to what extent do they draw attention to themselves".	
Acceptance-Pattern German Committed Group	Civil disobedience or more contentious forms of political participation is seen as a legitimate means of participation. Rather positive attitudes toward e.g. Next Generation. Rational: Measures create important visibility and attention
"MODERATOR: Was there a reason for you to join? GE_C_M2: Mixture. But also the topic of climate change" GE_C_F2: [...] There is currently a lot of discussion about climate stickers. And the proportionality of the means of choice. Nonetheless, disobedience is mentioned again. But these are measures that create visibility and attention, which I think is important. GE_C_M1: Is always a question of the current political discourse or the social discourse. At the beginning, there was also the issue of polarisation in society. In the 80s/90s, Green-Peace attacked whaling ships with rubber dinghies - today, in retrospect, says "well done" - quite a radical and clearly more radical form than sticking to the streets. Nobody goes out on the street now and says "Let's start whaling again". It always has something to do with the distance and the current political discourse.	
Acceptance-Pattern German Disconnected Group	Rejection of contentious forms of participation, especially Climate activists who glue themselves to roads are generally rejected. Rational: There are "rumours" that they are paid employees, and the perception is that it's just an ego trip with no real impact.

The environmental thing, for example, people go along with it because the environment is apparently important and they don't know why they are actually doing it. If you don't really know why you are there... then you shouldn't join. GE_D_F2: The well-known climate stickers that are all the rage right now. As I said, I've only heard about it from friends around me because they're totally pissed off. I ask myself, "What's the point?" - For the people who are stuck there, it's just an ego trip to say "I'm doing something here" - but it doesn't achieve anything. On the contrary, it makes people angry. It stops them and they come to work late. It's so pointless. It's just to say to yourself "Hey yes, I'm doing something" - but it doesn't do anything for anyone. And they don't achieve anything at all with it. "GE_D_F1: You know what the worst thing about it is that most of the people from these climate stickers are employees. They don't even do it out of conviction. They only make costs GE_D_F4: Where did you get this information? GE_D_F1: There was actually a report on television once GE_D_F4: Have you ever questioned this" "GE_D_F1: It doesn't matter whether they are employed or not. I'd say they're stuck there - millions of cars are stuck in traffic behind them. They all have the engine on. And I wonder.... GE_D_F2: Pointless GE_D_F1: ... what are they doing for the climate? So, bullshit to the power of 10." GE_D_M2: They would have to stick themselves in the Bundestag

Acceptance-Pattern German Women Group	Weighing the positive and negative effects: Rather approval of contentious forms of participation in the context of the expected consequences. Rational: In order to attract attention.
GE_F_F4: Our presence did not bring anything for the whole. But it did raise the profile of the topic in our working group. We discussed it a lot and tried to make things more sustainable in the lab. It raised the awareness. "M: So you didn't have that strong an impact on the demo, but the demo had an impact on your structure? GE_F_F4: Yes." GE_F_F3: I think they're called "next generation" the people who like to stick to the streets.... quite frankly, I think it's stupid. A - it's very expensive for those who have to pay for the mess. B - It tends to do no good. So, as a motorist, if someone is stuck in front of me on the road, then yes, I stand still. And I'm quite sure that half of all drivers who stand there also leave the engine running. The bottom line is that it doesn't help at all. GE_F_F2: I could say that this is also a form of strike - I think it's totally okay. There is no other way. I would also support it. If I were younger, I would also stick myself somewhere. It's a form of strike. And strike action brings something in the long run. GE_F_F3: Yes, I understand you completely, GE_F_F2. But ambulances - they don't know when someone is stuck on the road in front of them. What do they do when they have a call? Someone's had a stroke and they're standing still. Pregnant "GE_F_F2: But think a few years further, what do people do who live in an area where there is no water? Who takes care of the ambulance there? GE_F_F3: But what does sticking to the street in Germany have to do with the problem? GE_F_F2: To create an awareness that something is changing, please. And not so much is changing." GE_F_F1: I think the climate stickers are stupid too, to be honest. I mean, I understand that climate change is a big issue and that it's important. But it should be enforced in a different way. Because there have been many doctors who had emergency patients and ambulances or mums and dads who wanted to pick up the child - and these are people who can't help it at all and through such stupid actions others are endangered. "M: Then I'll ask you right away, what would be the forms that would be good? To fight the climate crisis? GE_F_F1: Nothing with sticking. Dialysis patients couldn't be cared for because they couldn't get through or the doctors couldn't get ahead." GE_F_F5: I sympathise with all those who are more committed than I. (LAUGHTER). I tend to think it's good. No one understands it any other way. feeling, I would say that most of the more	

boring forms of protest have simply been tried for a very, very long time without any success. I can totally understand that you say "you're not being heard" - that at some point you really shout very loudly. GE_F_F4: I am completely with GE_F_F2. I also see it as effective. It penetrates the consciousness. I always find it difficult to protest where the wrong people suffer. I also understand more extreme forms of protest. I also think it's good. But I think doing something really clever - but I can't think of anything. With the climate stickers, stupid name too, sometimes the wrong people suffer from it. I don't know if it reaches the people it's supposed to reach. It's the poor drivers who suffer

Acceptance-Pattern Greek Average Group	Protest and local groups are supported (discussed examples: animal protection) Reasoning: Personal responsibility and collective action
GR_A_F3: The point is to raise our children with principles, to learn to respect each other when they are young, to respect the environment, not to throw the garbage down. Let's start there first and then go along the way. Because when the problem persists, then what do you do to me? That is, if you do not learn to respect the other in the family, if you don't get principled first in the family, then at school, etc., don't expect much from marches. GR_A_F1's very serious! GR_A_F2: Very important! Because we see what happens to animals and how violently people treat animals. GR_A_F2: Exactly! So both the institutional and legal framework should be stricter on this, so that there is a kind of pressure on us being here protesting about this and wanting them to do something GR_A_M2: I think the march that is being done for animals, for those who have done some irregularities, there is a prison sentence now. GR_A_M2: agree! Because every government wants to have animal lovers with it. So if more people come out, they will... GR_A_M2: I think so. Because there are thousands of people who protect animals on their own, at their own cost. GR_A_F3: Lately there have been many attempts, I believe, at least here in my region. We also staged events for stray animals. There are many volunteer groups concerned with them. GR_A_M2: In our area, too. But some specific local person initiated this. And I see friends of mine who have animals and take them home and take care of them. GR_A_M2: That's right. In other words, things are being done in this area.	

Acceptance-Pattern Greek Disconnected Group	Support for more contentious forms of political participation (narrations on animal protection) Rational: An alternative voice must been heard
GR_F_F2: An alternative voice is heard. Another voice must be heard, a different voice, because we do not only have the political and economic problems in this place. The fact that GR_D_F3 has some kittens at work, etc., we know very well (at least that's what it sounds like) that all municipalities get money for strays. We haven't seen any of those do anything.	

Acceptance-Pattern Czech Disconnected Group	Scepticism towards more contentious forms of political participation. Rational: doubting the usefulness of demonstrations and petitions in this field.
C_D_F1: there is no point in demonstrating because of the climate, we are not going to change that. It won't help with migration either, it's there for a reason and we can't influence it. C_D_F1: nothing has ever happened with the petitions. The climate change thing, everyone needs to start with themselves. Signing a petition doesn't change anything. I don't see the effect.	

Acceptance-Pattern French Average Group	Personal Responsibility instead of Collective Action Rational: Any form of participation in the field of climate is powerless
F_A_F2: They're always asking the same people to make an effort.	

F_A_M3: There's a kind of powerlessness... No matter how much goodwill you put into it, at the next level up they do their thing and it's probably worse than it should be. There's a lot of green washing going on in big companies. They want to set an example, but in the end they don't do so much. As an average person, you get the impression that if you're the perfect environmentalist, there's little or no impact, even if you start now. F_A_F1: I think the best way to have an impact is to consume less. You don't need to have 20 T-shirts, 30 shirts and 15 pairs of trousers, you just need to stop buying things you don't need, and the manufacturers' output will decrease. F_A_M3: [...] It's the same thing with the environmental convention 2 years ago: there were measures, but none of them were applied. It was just ordinary citizens who were doing it, and in the end it proposed two laws that were also rejected. F_A_F1: Everyone can do something, but we shouldn't think that doing something for the environment necessarily costs a lot. Sorting your rubbish doesn't cost anything, neither does not buying things you don't need. And you save money because of inflation context.

Acceptance-Pattern French Committed Group	Personal Responsibility instead of Collective Action (especially political consumerism) Rational: Be careful at home, but we can't rely on politicians
F_C_M2: Apart from people rebelling, I don't really see what we can do, because we're not relying on politicians to change things. F_C_F2: for the environment, be careful at home to buy food that doesn't come from China, etc. F_C_F1: [...] As far as global warming is concerned, making savings on various things, water etc, energy, but at our level it's a bit complicated.	
Immigration	
Acceptance-Pattern Greek Average Group	Mixed attitudes toward collective action and NGOs (with the positive exception of Sea Rescue) Rational: Participation is necessary on the individual level, when personal life is addressed.
GR_A_F3: I think that in Lesvos – Mytilene, where a cousin of mine lives, the locals have also fought to save these people. The locals have also fought to save these people. GR_A_F3: I think it is a good thing to do. Everyone who can help should do it. I have a principle in my life basically: Not to do to the other what I don't want them to do to me. Walking with this motto in my life, I believe that I have never wronged anyone and when I could help, I did. That's my belief in dealing with all things. But because I know people and have friends who live on many different islands and I speak to them, I have heard that many of them do not behave well. So they have reached the point of making complaints to the coastguard, to people that they are allegedly behaving violently, etc., so I am a little sceptical about them. I do not know whether they want to save people or to increase their funds. GR_A_M2: I think they are like politicians, too! Some do their job properly and offer their whole being and some just sit and take the money that some NGOs get and do nothing! GR_A_F2: I am not so suspicious of NGOs. I think most of them produce some kind of work. How useful everything can be, indeed because there is this game of subsidies and sponsorships and all that, but there are excellent examples of people doing serious work. And there must be there, because they operate independently of a government that may have some other purposes. What GR_A_F3 said "They denounce the coast guard" and such... They should report it if the coast guard or some other people have done something illegal, yes, they should report it! We want them to do it. Because maybe it's the only way to get some things known! I don't always think that if the other person behaves... GR_A_M2: Less interesting to participate in some action for these people. Which should not be the case because we might have been in their place. Some say, "We don't care who those people are, so why protest about this thing?" unless it's near some area where they're scared or they get more and then they mobilise... That is, here in Mandra, where we are next to refugees, there used to be	

a march and it had happened in Larissa "Why do you bring them here? They're going to take our jobs." GR_A_M2: Yes, that! To get them away Not for the rights of people who have been through a lot and thousands are lost in a sea. Children, parents, elderly people. It is not like the previous photo where you showed so many people coming out to protest for the rights of these people. It's if they hurt us. GR_A_M2: We are talking about rescue. Because the rescuer is human. Saves lives. It's not simple. GR_A_F1: I admire it immensely! GR_A_M2: And so do I. GR_A_F1: You have to have tremendous strength to do that. I wish there were more examples GR_A_M2absolutely! In general, Greece has helped refugees coming from Turkey immensely. GR_A_F1: It has drowned quite a few, also, but okay! GR_A_F3: I think the Turks drown them. They put them in rotten boats. And now in the last few days big batches are coming in again! The phenomenon is on the rise again. They bring in people you don't know who they are, where they are from, they enter without registration, without applying. That's why this conversation is very long.

Acceptance-Pattern Czech Average Group	Scepticism towards collective action in the field of immigration Rational: Sceptical towards the ideology behind the action
C_A_F3: only demonstrations against migration rather than for migration. If there is a demonstration, I want to know who is behind it. That's an important thing to find out. It's absurd to me those liberal things don't. That would have to be assuming the government listens to the demonstrators. I don't know if that's the case in the Czech Republic. The Prime Minister has condemned it out of hand. If the government cares, it makes sense. When the government does what it wants, it doesn't make sense. But it does make sense, it gets out there and it reaches other people. The question is how the media reports it. I used to work in the media. If you want to portray the man as a toothless asshole, that's how you portray him. But it makes sense, it gets the issue out there. And it depends on who's looking at it. C_D_M1: I just signed a petition with Islamization. I see behind it mainly a huge fear of what is and has been coming at us. It was against how the first mosques were built in the country, that's a bit of a religious fear of Islam. Islam and Christianity are not peaceful religions. Promoting another faith that is pretty radical doesn't sit well with me. It didn't lead to anything. There's a mosque in Teplice.	

(Source: ActEU Focus Groups)

4.5 Conclusion: participatory trust

With this chapter we added conceptually and empirically to the challenge to better understand the relationships between political trust and political participation.

Firstly, we add to concept of political trust by conceptualization a behavioural side of trust: participatory trust. We find that the perceptual side of participation and especially attitudes and emotions matter for participation behaviour, we observe an interplay here. For citizens across the countries investigated it is more important that political participation is perceived as having an effect on political decision-making (efficacy), than the form or type of participation (conventional, unconventional, less or more contentious).

Secondly, based on our qualitative thematic analyses of the interlinkages between political participation and political trust we created individual profiles of focus groups participants and find, that process-knowledge about how to participate and participation efforts have an effect on the political-decision making process are interlinked with political trust. However, no clear pattern emerges about whether this leads to a greater likelihood of opting for forms of participation that are outside or inside formal institutional channels of representative democracy.

Thirdly, the idea was to better understand circumstances under which citizens are more likely to choose and accept less conventional forms of political participation, which we operationalize throughout the report as more contentious action (especially more disruptive protest). For the fields of climate change and immigration we found different "acceptance narratives" on individual level and across the groups. We can bundle the different "acceptance patterns" into five types:

Type A: Rejection of contentious forms of political participation (e.g. German Average group and German disconnected group climate change

Type B: Contentious forms of political participation as a legitimate means (e.g.Germany committed group climate change)

Type C: Contentious forms of political participation to make an alternative voice heard / as a means to an end (e.g. German Women Group, Greek disconnected group)

Type D: Acceptance on the local level

Type E: Personal responsibility instead of collective action (e.g. Greek average group migration; French average group climate change)

Overall, we see that the topic of contentious forms of participation in the field of climate change triggered much discussions in the groups in Germany and Greece, and less in Czechia and France. We observe intra-group dynamics with regard to the acceptance of contentious forms (like protest or 'gluing to the ground') in the field of climate change. We see that unconventional and contentious forms of participation in Germany are less accepted by individuals who have been grouped as 'disengaged' and 'average' and more accepted by citizens of the 'committed' and 'women only' groups. In Greece a visual related to animal protection triggered narrations about how positive unconventional forms of action are at the local level, but also narrations about the necessity of individual responsibility and individual actions. Little discussion (despite prompting through visuals) and intra-group dynamics on the acceptance of contentious action in the field of climate change was recorded in Czechia, while in France the dominant discussions were not on collective action but on the responsibility of individual citizens for example through political consumerism.

Overall we see many discussions on the topic of immigration as a challenge, but hardly narrations on political participation or contentious action in the field of immigration.

5 Policy section I: climate change

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5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will explore the relationship between political (dis)trust and (un)conventional modes of political participation on a specific topic: climate change. More specifically, the effect of climate change-related polarisation on the previously mentioned relationship will be explored, to study if they constitute a moderating or a strengthening factor on the potential effect of political (dis)trust on (un)conventional modes of action, analysed through their legitimisation and the recent participation in such political activities. Our research is structured around the mobilisation of data emanating from the ActEU survey, the European Social Survey and web-scraped data extracted from the social media *X*.

5.2 Literature review on climate change, political trust, and participation

Existing literature discussing political trust, polarisation, and participation in the field of climate change follows some distinct directions. First, the literature has discussed the appearance and increase in trends of polarisation in public opinion on climate change, and in particular the degree of its partisan and ideological nature, beginning with the case of the US (Antonio and Brulle 2011; Zhou 2016) then moving to discuss Europe (McCright et al. 2016). A second major interest is work investigating the role of political trust in policy support, where trust understood in different ways is found to be crucial for the efficiency and adoption of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, but also for individual 'pro-climate' behaviour (Fairbrother et al 2019). Within this general stream of work a significant amount of interest has also been dedicated to right wing populism and themes of climate change denialism and policy scepticism here, pointing to the intersections between growing polarisation, declining political trust, and opposition to costly environmental policies (e.g. Lockwood 2018; Huber 2020). Finally, work on contentious political participation – on protests – has investigated the collective action frames of climate justice protesters to reveal their claims (Parks et al 2023). Here themes of polarisation and political trust are hinted at, but not tackled in depth. Work discussing the overlaps and interconnections between polarisation, political trust, and contentious political participation thus forms a valuable contribution to the existing literature.

The theme of polarisation around issues of climate change is much discussed in existing academic literature, with the first debates concerning increasingly marked polarisation and climate scepticism in the US context. Antonio and Brulle discuss this in terms of rooted neoliberal discourses of economic growth, noting that these "compose a complex of institutions, habits, and attitudes, or a "habitus" insouciant about social and ecological limits". In such a discursive field, they argue, believing in anthropogenic climate change does not leave the public ready to support policies that risk growth (2011, p. 199). This general point is pertinent to the idea of polarisation with reference to climate change. The polarisation at stake may concern those who accept the scientifically proven reality of anthropogenic climate change and its serious consequences for all life on earth as opposed to those that deny it; or it may also concern polarisation amongst those who support far-reaching climate mitigation and adaptation policies, and those who do not. Failing to parse out these different positions may lead to misleading analyses where those who are opposed to a policy – including because they feel it does not go far enough – may be mistaken for climate denialists. Scholars have thus distinguished "between *trend, attribution* and *impact* scepticism, reflecting scepticism based on whether people think climate change is occurring, is human-induced

and is harmful" (Kulin et al 2021, p. 1114). Others have nevertheless noted that polarisation in the US follows a partisan pattern that is also reproduced in the Anglophone world more broadly, where belief in and support for action on climate change has become a feature of those supporting the left, and the opposite, the right (McCright et al. 2016).

The picture of climate change and polarisation in Europe is rather more complicated and has evolved quickly over the last 10 or 15 years. Based on data from the 2008 Eurobarometer, McCright and colleagues note a similar though much less pronounced ideological divide on climate change to that in the US where Western European countries are concerned (with the exception of the UK), but not in former Communist countries (2016). They suggest that this beginning of polarisation, not noted in earlier studies, may be traced to the financial crisis and the politicisation of public spending cuts, to climategate (an e-mail hack at the University of East Anglia misrepresented by the climate denialists as evidence of the fabrication of evidence for anthropogenic climate change), and the disappointing Copenhagen COP of the UNFCCC (2016). Some similarities in this general picture of polarisation on climate change persist in studies using more recent data. Fisher et al (2022) confirm that partisan divides in Europe seem less marked than in the US, but not that a simple left-right measure may miss important nuances, since left-right dichotomies are themselves references to a mixture of economic and cultural values. Given that in Europe climate change scepticism is also expressed through opposition to costly policies (see below), untangling these elements is key. Attention to a range of political and economic values, in addition to climate change beliefs, yields the finding that "party differences in worry about climate change are stronger than those in beliefs about the extent to which climate change has been caused by humans" (Fisher et al 2022, p. 5) in Western Europe, while no clear patterns emerge as far as Central and Eastern European countries are concerned.

Partisanship thus seems to matter when considering climate change polarisation in Europe. This is also confirmed by an important recent study of cross-time data from across the world by Caldwell, Cohen, and Vivyan (2024). They underline the polarisation-policy connection once more, highlighting that the broad social and political consensus that is necessary to underpin effective and far-reaching climate change adaptation and mitigation policies is unlikely to be reached where polarisation is on the rise. They investigate data from the International Social Survey Programme from 1993 up to 2020 – thus covering the period after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the peak of the climate justice social movement wave (see below), and the rise of right-wing populist ideas and parties to government in many countries in Europe. With reference to their latest data in 2020, they find that while polarisation is still rising the fastest in the US and English-speaking countries, it was at substantial levels comparable to the US in much of Western Europe with one important difference. While climate denialism remains considerable in the US, in Western Europe polarisation on climate change presents as more connected to support or opposition to environmental policy: Western Europeans tend to accept the reality of anthropogenic climate change, but to oppose 'costly' policy remedies (Caldwell et al. 2024, p. 21) – a finding also echoed in studies of even extreme right-wing politicians in the European Parliament (Forchtner and Lubarda 2022). Partisan polarisation – that is polarisation on climate change by political party support – is also found to be important in Western Europe, though not so much in Central and Eastern Europe. Partisan polarisation is seen to be fairly uneven though with reference to data up to 2020 – the authors see this as a questions of 'niche' parties versus more mainstream ones. They do however note that niche, often right-wing populist, parties are often entering coalition governments and

"pushing mainstream parties to cover niche positions" (ibid, p. 22). It is this mission to differentiate themselves that seems to be driving polarisation more than worries about costs or even ideological questions. Since 2020, these 'niche' parties have become more and more successful in European elections, and arguably the view of costly climate policies as part of a green elite agenda in line with other broader conspiracy theories that also drive racist and anti-immigration ideas (Lockwood 2018) may be driving polarisation over policy even further.

Polarisation in climate change debates has also been studied with reference to media communication. A recent example published in Nature Climate Change looks at the degree of structural polarisation on climate change on social media. Tweets concerning COPs of the UNFCCC over time from 2014 to 2021 (Falkenberg et al. 2022). Over time, they find increasing evidence of polarisation and that polarisation becomes more mainstream. Around 2014 tweets on the UNFCCC COP were mostly pro-climate with a much smaller sceptic minority, yet as time moves on this minority becomes both stronger and moves into accounts held by much better known figures (ibid). As for more traditional media, here too evidence is found that "climate change is becoming a considerable element of existing partisan political identities … 'polar media' consumed by primarily right or left-leaning audiences can contribute to identity polarisation. They tend to vary in their portrayals of the identities in a way that could reinforce their audiences' existing perceptions of political in- and outgroups' beliefs and attitudes towards climate change" (Tschötschel 2023, p. 1073). Media representations of partisan polarisation are thus also found to drive the same phenomenon amongst individuals.

Studies looking more specifically at themes of political trust and climate change issues often focuses on trust in information about climate change and how this shapes individual pro-climate or climate-friendly behaviours (using public transport, cycling, recycling and such like). Much more relevant to the matter in hand are the wealth of studies that delve into the role of political trust with reference to environmental policy support or, more often, opposition. Given the findings in the scholarship on climate change polarisation, which points to higher levels of polarisation in (Western) Europe precisely around support or opposition for policies, this literature is of interest. As Falkenberg et al. (2022) note in their study of polarisation on climate change on twitter, distrust actually appears to unite both pro-climate and sceptic actors: in tweets on UNFCCC COPs politicians are portrayed as hypocrites by both, either because of their greenwashing behaviour (such as the use of private jets) or because they are pushing a pro-climate agenda.

On trust and support for environmental policy, Haring (2018) finds that trust in public administrative bodies amongst young Swedes predicts support for state interventions rewarding good environmental behaviour, while distrust in private industry actors predicts support for more punitive measures like taxes. Challenging findings about the importance of political ideology in policy support, Fairbrother et al. (2019) find political trust to be far more important in their study across 23 different European countries using 2016 data. In particular, political trust combined with belief in the scientific reality of anthropogenic climate change appears to drive support for more costly policies such as higher taxes on fossil fuels, though political trust is the stronger factor. They suggest that decision-makers should thus work to increase more general political trust levels to breed support for environmental policy in this connection (ibid, p. 9). Yet Kulin, Johansson Sevä, and Dunlap find contrasting evidence in their study based on the 2016 ESS, namely that "higher levels of social and political trust are associated with *greater* climate change scepticism" (2021, p. 1123).

This last study is one among many looking specifically at questions of policy support and opposition and right-wing populist parties. Focusing on the question of how support for right-wing populist ideologies and parties shapes public beliefs about climate change, Kulin, Johanssan Sevä and Dunlap note that nationalism may clash with support for supranational climate change policy (2021, p. 1113). Drawing on data from the 2016 ESS they confirm that the rise in nationalism linked to right-wing populism has had effects on climate scepticism: "when those with strong nationalist leanings form their attitudes toward climate policies … nationalist concerns appear to trump beliefs and concern about climate change" (ibid, p. 1128). It is nationalist beliefs that appear crucial to drive climate scepticism and policy opposition in this view. Bringing trust-adjacent issues into focus, Huber (2020) finds that anti-elitism among populists – which could be described as a lack of trust in elites – is linked to both climate scepticism and low support for environmental policy in the UK. This finding also holds according to a comparative study of several European countries where right-wing populism is concerned (Huber et al. 2021), though left-wing populism is instead found to be used to call for stronger environmental policy. For (right-wing) populism, trust issues thus interact with partisanship and ideology questions where policy support is concerned, while the latter are more important in explaining broader questions of polarisation. Nevertheless, populism is treated as a threat in the literature on environmental policy support. Climate denialism among populists, albeit less rife in Europe, is instead found to be linked to both distrust of political actors and scientists in the Austrian case (Huber et al. 2021). Policy opposition regarding climate change also finds some overlaps with opposition to immigration. Krange et al (2019), discussing Norway, find that those opposing immigration are also more likely to support people declaring disbelief in anthropogenic climate change, and the nationalist beliefs that characterize opposition to immigration are also likely to include so-called climate refugees, as well as opposition to international level treaty decisions (Kulin et al. 2021).

Moving to consider relevant findings in the literature on collective action, particularly contentious politics, climate change, and trust. Here a general overview to set the scene concerning recent protest waves on climate change in Europe is useful. Parks, Oberthür and Maarova (2023) distinguish three main overlapping trends in a recent protest wave on climate change issues in the European context: mass protests; disruptive activism; and direct mitigation actions or community creation. Following on from previous climate activism that flowed from mobilisations against austerity measures during the financial crisis, but also and notably from disappointment in the perceived failures of multilateralism that came to a head with the Copenhagen COP of the UNFCCC, mass climate protests associated in the main part with the youth movement organisation Fridays for Future and the figure of Greta Thunberg peaked in Europe around 2018-2019 before being cut off by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In parallel, a turn to disruptive political participation strategies was spearheaded in the UK by a new group, Extinction Rebellion. This group began holding more performative and disruptive types of protests, including the blocking of roads, 'die-ins', and occupations of fossil fuel-linked industries. After the Covid-19 pandemic, other groups were created that also used more disruptive civil disobedience strategies, the most prominent at the current time being Just Stop Oil and The Last Generation (active mostly in Germany, Austria, and Italy). Finally, and less overtly contentious, a stream of 'sustainable materialism' or 'environmental action organisations' has also emerged in the same time frame (Blühdorn and Deflorian 2021; Schlosberg and Craven 2019). This range of actions "are organised

in solidaristic, democratic ways, intended to challenge power balances in society" and acting outside the market (Parks et al. 2023, p. 18).

To link this overview to issues of trust and polarisation the central claims of these three streams of contentious political participation on climate change are instructive. The mass protests (climate strikes) led by Fridays for Future ask for "policymakers to listen to "united science"" (de Moor et al 2020, p. 26); the claims of disruptive groups coalesce around demands for the creation of citizens' assemblies and thus deliberative democratic additions to existing national representative democracies (Parks et al. 2023); while sustainable materialist groups do not make such identifiable claims, it could be said that their actions speak to system change by acting outside of normal market spheres (Blühdorn and Deflorian 2021). In recent years, the principle social movement groups of contentious climate activism have thus made quite 'state-centric' claims for governments to act on available information about the effects of climate change, and to make more spaces available for meaningful dialogues and inputs from citizens. What this might suggest at first blush is rather more political trust than might be first supposed at least among the organisers of protests. Research drawing from the results of a protest survey administered to participants in Fridays Future marches in 15 European countries as well as the US, Australia and Mexico in March and September 2019 draws a different picture regarding political trust amongst individual participants however. Asked how far they felt "governments can be relied on to solve our environmental problems", the overwhelming majority of protesters answered 'not at all' – though levels of trust were markedly higher amongst youth protesters when compared to adults (de Moor et al 2020, p. 27). Their trust in modern science was instead much higher. The role of distrust in predicting the choice to take part in more contentious actions is indicated by these findings, particularly if we consider the involvement of a range of movement groups including Extinction Rebellion at these marches.

Contentious actions have also been on the rise in Europe against environmental policies. The Yellow Vests (*Gilets Jaunes*) movement which began in France in 2018 is a notable example sparked by a rise in fuel tax and with clearly climate-sceptic elements. A central claim of this movement was however similar to the civil disobedience groups mentioned above: they asked for a citizens' assembly – and secured one in the form of the French 'Grand Débat' participatory process (Ehs and Mokre 2021). Mistrust in an environmental policy, in this case, thus also seems to drive contentious action against effective climate change action. Similarly, in 2024, farmers protests broke out across Europe around various grievances including concerns about the impacts of environmental policy. Part of the responses to these protests included backsliding on environmental policies, including the EU's Nature Restoration Law. The role of trust in choices for contentious political action thus appears to shape both pro- and anti-climate aims, though quantitative scholarship on this is relatively scarce and the suggestion requires further investigation. Scholarship on the role of polarisation in this view is equally rare, though Falkenberg et al (2022) do note that an increase in twitter polarisation on climate change did coincide with the Fridays for Future climate marches. They suggest that this may indicate that the increase in climate sceptic talk, and thus polarisation after 2018, is a backlash against the rise of climate justice activism.

Overall, the scholarship on polarisation around climate change in Europe suggests a key role for ideology, partisanship and teaches us that rather than climate denialism European climate change polarisation is more to do with policy support and opposition. Work on trust, in the meantime, also

concentrates on policy and suggests that trust is needed for this, along with belief in anthropogenic climate change. Right-wing populism is found to be particularly problematic for policy support, promoting nationalism and distrust in elites that equate with climate scepticism. This also points to an interaction between polarisation and difficulties in securing broad consensus for climate action. Contentious political actions also point to the presence of political distrust – and here that distrust translated into actions both for more far-reaching climate action and against attempted climate policies. Here however scholarship is scarcer, and not based on large datasets. An investigation of how polarisation, political trust, and contentious political action choices are interrelated seems warranted for the field of climate change on this basis, not only because work looking at all three of these themes does not yet exist, but because of increasing (though anecdotal) evidence of a popular backlash against climate change policies in a climate of rising right-wing populism, and right-wing populist parties in power in Europe.

5.3 Political (dis)trust, participation in unconventional political activities and polarisation on climate change

For the purposes of this deliverable, we decided tackle the Hypothesis 2-a ("*A high degree of polarisation on climate change strengthens the relationship between degree of political trust and likelihood of choosing less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation*") with a focus on the potential role of political distrust in contentious participation. The general hypothesis we posed is that a high degree of polarisation on *climate change* strengthens the relationship between degree of political trust and having been involved in protest actions. In this report, we focus on the joint effect of distrust and polarisation on contentious politics, by using the results of both the ActEU survey and the ESS survey.

Table 5.1 Recent participation in a demonstration – Trust in European and (sub)national MPs

	Demonstration (if trust in European MPs)		Demonstration (if trust in all (sub)national MPs)	
MPs follow the rules (Agree)	0.346	**	0.334	**
	(0.116)		(0.069)	
MPs' work is open and transparent (Agree)	0.137		0.210	**
	(0.132)		(0.076)	
MPs try to achieve good things (Agree)	-0.049		-0.042	
	(0.126)		(0.075)	
MPs want to do their best to serve the country (Agree)	0.106		0.062	
	(0.127)		(0.076)	
MPs understand the needs of my community (Agree)	0.274	*	0.082	
	(0.130)		(0.075)	
Intercept	-1.879	**	-1.910	**
	(0.071)		(0.042)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05
(Source: ActEU Survey)

Table 5.2 Recent participation in a demonstration – Trust in European and (sub)national MPs - Polarisation on climate change

	Demonstration (if trust in European MPs)		Demonstration (if trust in all (sub)national MPs)	
MPs follow the rules (Agree)	0.299	*	0.299	**
	(0.118)		(0.069)	
MPs' work is open and transparent (Agree)	0.146		0.196	*
	(0.134)		(0.078)	
MPs try to achieve good things (Agree)	-0.106		-0.073	
	(0.130)		(0.077)	
MPs want to do their best to serve the country (Agree)	0.087		0.037	
	(0.129)		(0.077)	
MPs understand the needs of my community (Agree)	0.296	*	0.062	
	(0.132)		(0.076)	
Feeling towards people believing climate change is human made (Negative)	0.256		0.035	
	(0.186)		(0.115)	
Feeling towards people believing climate change is human made (Positive)	0.226		0.357	**
	(0.119)		(0.071)	
Feeling towards people denying climate change is human made (Negative)	0.378	**	0.148	*
	(0.124)		(0.074)	
Feeling towards people denying climate change is human made (Positive)	0.535	**	0.498	**
	(0.152)		(0.089)	
Intercept	-2.139	**	-2.118	**
	(0.087)		(0.051)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05
(Source: ActEU Survey)

This analysis shows that where political polarisation on climate change is found to **strengthen** the relationship between political trust and choosing to take part in public demonstrations, political trust expressed as believing that European MPs' "understand the needs of my community" and that all "national" MPs (local, regional and national MPs) "follow the rules", are the particular forms of political trust that coincide with this choice. When we take into account the answers to the second question on trust, the importance of trust in different national political actors finds some confirmation, as recent participation in a demonstration is positively associated with trust in the government. For the European level, the result about the role of trust in MEPs both as following the rules and understanding community needs is nuanced, since trust in the EU Commission

emerges as negatively associated with participation in a demonstration, suggesting that trust EU trust can vary by EU institution with different effects on choices for political participation. Trust in regional level politicians is also negatively associated with participation in a demonstration. This appears to contradict the finding about the trust in regional MPs as following the rules having a positive effect on participation in a demonstration. However, in the climate change policy field believing that MPs follow the rules could also be interpreted as a sign of distrust if we consider the literature on climate change activism.

Adding polarisation on climate change to the picture of those who had taken part in a public demonstration, political trust now emerges most strongly as the view of MPs as following the rules, wanting to do their best the serve their country, and understanding the needs of citizens' communities. In turn, those same people expressed a positive view of people who accept the anthropogenic nature of climate change, or a negative view of those who do not accept the scientific fact of anthropogenic climate change, or they have a negative view of those who accept anthropogenic climate change. This suggests that the links between polarisation, political trust, and the decision to take part in more contentious forms of participation such as demonstrations does not describe only those with pro-climate or climate justice positions, nor only those with climate-sceptic positions. Individuals with opposed opinions who nevertheless express trust in members of parliaments at different scales all take part in demonstrations. Seeing MPs as trustworthy – or more precisely as people who follow rules, want to do their best to serve the country and understand the needs of communities – thus appears to play a role for all those with strong positions – in one direction or another – on human made climate change who take part in demonstrations. The existing literature suggests that believing in anthropogenic climate change is a commonly held position in Western Europe (see literature review above) which may suggest that treating belief in those who accept the fact of anthropogenic climate change as a polarised opinion is not accurate. If we consider polarisation as the gap between belief and disbelief in anthropogenic climate change, however, the finding that taking part in a demonstration is linked to both of these positions as well as trust in MPs at different levels and of different types, is an interesting one. It is not distrust that appears to drive the decision to take part in a demonstration amongst those with strong beliefs on climate change.

Table 5.3 Recent participation in a strike – Trust in European and (sub)national MPs

	Strike (if trust in European MPs)		Strike (if trust in all (sub)national MPs)	
MPs follow the rules (Agree)	0.212		0.313	**
	(0.134)		(0.076)	
MPs' work is open and transparent (Agree)	0.187		0.476	**
	(0.150)		(0.083)	
MPs try to achieve good things (Agree)	-0.192		-0.124	
	(0.146)		(0.083)	
MPs want to do their best to serve the country (Agree)	-0.003		-0.061	
	(0.147)		(0.084)	
MPs understand the needs of my community (Agree)	0.611	**	0.189	*
	(0.147)		(0.082)	
Intercept	-2.208	**	-2.204	**
	(0.080)		(0.047)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU Survey)

Table 5.4 Recent participation in a strike – Trust in European and (sub)national MPs - Polarisation on climate change

	Strike (if trust in European MPs)		Strike (if trust in all (sub)national MPs)	
MPs follow the rules (Agree)	0.191		0.299	**
	(0.136)		(0.069)	
MPs' work is open and transparent (Agree)	0.118		0.196	*
	(0.153)		(0.078)	
MPs try to achieve good things (Agree)	-0.153		-0.073	
	(0.149)		(0.077)	
MPs want to do their best to serve the country (Agree)	0.009		0.037	
	(0.148)		(0.077)	
MPs understand the needs of my community (Agree)	0.560	**	0.062	
	(0.149)		(0.076)	
Feeling towards people believing climate change is human made (Negative)	-0.065		0.035	
	(0.215)		(0.115)	
Feeling towards people believing climate change is human made (Positive)	0.036		0.357	**
	(0.136)		(0.071)	
Feeling towards people denying climate change is human made (Negative)	-0.161		0.148	*
	(0.150)		(0.074)	
Feeling towards people denying climate change is human made (Positive)	0.739	**	0.498	**
	(0.159)		(0.089)	
Intercept	-2.256	**	-2.118	**
	(0.094)		(0.051)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU Survey)

Literature discussing the most recent wave of youth climate strikes has drawn attention to their framings linked to following the rules. Activists have called for national politicians and governments to act in line with 'the science' to face up to climate change, for example (de Moor et al 2021). Many more mainstream or institutionalized environmental organizations have also been involved in pressuring for the proper implementation of existing rules by national states through climate litigation (Setzer and Vanhala 2019). On the other hand, we know that climate activism takes heterogeneous forms, and that activist groups dedicated to the climate justice agenda may not intend 'following the rules' in a uniformly positive sense. Where climate justice is concerned there are calls from activists for civil disobedience in order to achieve more transformative action, and to signal moral dissatisfaction with the current approach to climate change (Cugnata et al 2024). The fact that we ask here about participation in 'a public demonstration' could potentially include both more contentious protests involving elements of civil disobedience as well as those more modular or routinized demonstrations like climate justice marches or similar. The finding on trust as "following the rules" may thus be nuanced, as this is not always seen as a virtue by those demanding tougher responses to climate change.

When we consider strikes, a rather different type of contentious political action, a rather similar general picture appears. Once again, those who took part in a strike over the past year see regional and European MPs as trustworthy in terms of following the rules and of wanting to do their best to serve their country, and also as being people who understand the needs of communities. Considering strikes as linked to regional areas and jobs, the addition of this type of trust, which may suggest either some confidence in MPs as able to act in defence of regional jobs, or at least to have empathy with those on strike. In the field of climate change, the discussion on strikes may be related to the current EU-wide objective of a just transition. Just transition is directed precisely at the tackling the idea that environmental policies must involve trade-offs including job losses. Just transition policies seek to tackle this for industries, and areas, where economies are significantly interlinked with fossil fuel-dependent industry, including mining. The just transition aim, and the broader debate about the trade offs between economic growth, jobs, and environmental policy, have become central in Europe. Thus, when we add polarisation on climate change to the analysis, another possible layer of interpretation emerges around the theme of the just transition and debates about the distribution of the costs and benefits of climate action.

Our analysis shows that those who took part in strikes are more likely to have positive opinions about climate denialists and negative opinions about those who accept the scientific reality of anthropogenic climate change (i.e. that climate change is driven by human actions). In the year prior to our survey, strikes by farmers and other workers driven, among other reasons, by the perceived negative effects of environmental policies were very visible in Europe and often targeted EU legislation such as the Nature Restoration Law (e.g. Finger et al 2024). Prior to that, the widespread *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) protests from 2018 had also been driven by opposition to a fossil fuel tax, and the perceived unfair burden of the costs of an energy transition seen as a global or international level decision on the everyday lives of workers and ordinary citizens (Martin and Islar 2021). Though not strikes, the Yellow Vests protests are indicative of a new wave of opposition to environmental policies in Europe. The fact that trust in both national and European level MPs helps explain participation in strikes alongside some propensity to accept climate denialist positions may reflect the increase in numbers of MPs that share these positions – whether in the form of climate denialism outright or, more commonly, in the form of opposition

to specific environmental policy agendas. In the case of farmers protests, for example, the work of right-wing MEPs was key to the opposition against nature restoration rules.

Table 5.5 Recent participation in an unauthorised protest activity – Trust in European and (sub)national MPs

	Unauthorised protests (if trust in European MPs)		Unauthorised protests (if trust in all (sub)national MPs)	
MPs follow the rules (Agree)	0.348	*	0.584	**
	(0.173)		(0.100)	
MPs' work is open and transparent (Agree)	0.742	**	0.669	**
	(0.187)		(0.105)	
MPs try to achieve good things (Agree)	-0.365		-0.327	**
	(0.188)		(0.108)	
MPs want to do their best to serve the country (Agree)	0.025		0.095	
	(0.188)		(0.107)	
MPs understand the needs of my community (Agree)	0.490	**	0.410	**
	(0.185)		(0.104)	
Intercept	-2.990	**	-3.154	**
	(0.109)		(0.068)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05
(Source: ActEU Survey)

Table 5.6 Recent participation in an unauthorized protest activity – Trust in European and (sub)national MPs - Polarisation on climate change

	Unauthorised protests (if trust in European MPs)		Unauthorised protests (if trust in all (sub)national MPs)	
MPs follow the rules (Agree)	0.350	*	0.578	**
	(0.176)		(0.101)	
MPs' work is open and transparent (Agree)	0.663	**	0.573	**
	(0.188)		(0.108)	
MPs try to achieve good things (Agree)	-0.267		-0.331	**
	(0.190)		(0.110)	
MPs want to do their best to serve the country (Agree)	0.066		0.079	
	(0.189)		(0.109)	
MPs understand the needs of my community (Agree)	0.417	*	0.339	**
	(0.187)		(0.106)	
Feeling towards people believing climate change is human made (Negative)	-0.372		-0.584	**
	(0.283)		(0.179)	
Feeling towards people believing climate change is human made (Positive)	-0.477	**	0.007	
	(0.179)		(0.098)	
Feeling towards people denying climate change is human made (Negative)	-0.059		-0.621	**
	(0.200)		(0.123)	
Feeling towards people denying climate change is human made (Positive)	0.845	**	0.899	**
	(0.192)		(0.106)	
Intercept	-2.933	**	-3.047	**
	(0.123)		(0.075)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU Survey)

The finding that those with positive opinions on climate change deniers are more likely to have participated in a strike, which may in the field of climate change be linked to opposition to policies for the energy transition and effects on jobs in Europe, is to some extent bolstered when we consider that those who express the same types of trust in MPs as strikers (i.e. they see MPs as following the rules, open and transparent, and as understanding the needs of their communities) but declare that they participated in 'unauthorized' protest activities also hold more positive opinions about climate denialism. As mentioned, opposition to these policies included action that can be described as "unauthorised" protest – driving tractors into city centres or up to parliament buildings, for example. In addition, this group of respondents who took part in unauthorised protests tend not to see MPs as trying 'to achieve good things' and not, then, as potential allies for their claims. This suggests the more nuanced view of political trust mentioned – that is that trust in following the rules and working openly and transparently does not necessarily include trust in the ultimate aims of elected representatives. The analysis suggests that distrust in what MPs aim to do is a driver for unauthorised, and thus more contentious, protest, in line with grievance approaches (Gamson 1975). In the area of climate change, these features and the propensity towards climate denialism could point to unauthorized protests such as the farmers protests of 2024.

Table 5.7 Self-declared probability of joining protests – Distrust in European and (sub)national MPs

	Distrust (Worried on climate change: yes)		Distrust (Worried on climate change: no)		Distrust (Feeling responsible for climate change: yes)		Distrust (Feeling responsible for climate change: no)	
Participation in an unlawful public demonstration (last 12 months)	0.135	**	0.083	**	0.148	**	0.100	*
	(0.014)		(0.025)		(0.021)		(0.045)	
Mistrusting people	0.231	**	0.179	**	0.250	**	0.134	**
	(0.006)		(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.012)	
Woman	-0.015	**	-0.037	**	-0.026	**	-0.074	**
	(0.005)		(0.007)		(0.008)		(0.012)	
Low social life	0.030	**	0.051	**	0.034	**	0.008	
	(0.007)		(0.009)		(0.011)		(0.014)	
Low social activity	0.045	**	0.046	**	0.033	**	0.015	
	(0.005)		(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.012)	
Low income	0.037	**	0.023	*	0.031	**	0.007	
	(0.008)		(0.010)		(0.011)		(0.013)	
Seeing vote as not efficient	0.098	**	0.124	**	0.115	**	0.096	**
	(0.006)		(0.011)		(0.010)		(0.017)	
Intercept	0.535	**	0.626	**	0.514	**	0.768	**
	(0.005)		(0.006)		(0.007)		(0.011)	
Number of observations	32407		14699		14898		4251	

** p<.01, * p<.05
(Sources: ESS, rounds 8-10-11)

The ESS survey allows us to look at the effects of a respondent feeling worried about or personally responsible for climate change, their degrees of political trust, and the likelihood they have participated in an 'unlawful demonstration'. Our general findings from the ActEU survey point to a stronger likelihood in protesting alongside political distrust for respondents indicative more pro-climate and climate sceptic responses. The results of the ESS survey also point in this direction: both those who worry and those who don't worry about climate change alongside political distrust are more likely to have participated in an unlawful public demonstration, while feeling no personal responsibility for climate change and political distrust has a similar effect, albeit weaker. We also performed a similar analysis for political trust, which shows the exact opposite effect providing further confirmation for this. This suggests that in a more general sense it is political distrust that seems to shape more costly or contentious protest participation, whether for or against climate action. Overall, our findings point to the idea the political trust and political distrust play a more nuanced role in less contentious, peaceful demonstrations, while political distrust emerges as a

stronger factor for participation in more costly contentious action such as the unlawful public demonstrations named in the ESS survey.

5.4 Political (dis)trust, legitimisation of unconventional participation and polarisation on climate change

After having studied the influence of polarisation about climate change on the relationship between political (dis)trust and participation in unconventional political activities, we will explore in the present section the effect of this same polarisation on "*the relationship between degree of political trust and level of acceptability towards protest actions*" (Hypothesis 3-a) through the mobilisation of the data emanating from the ActEU Survey.

Table 5.8 Self-declared probability of joining protests – Distrust in European and (sub)national MPs

	Joining a protest (if distrust in EU MPs)		Joining a protest (if distrust in all (sub)national MPs	
Young	0.287	*	0.498	**
	(0.146)		(0.090)	
MPs distort the facts to make policies look good (Agree)	0.072		0.186	
	(0.146)		(0.096)	
Uncertain whether or not MPs care about people like me (Agree)	-0.019		-0.044	
	(0.157)		(0.099)	
Unsure if MPs try to make things better or worse (Agree)	0.525	**	0.039	
	(0.150)		(0.094)	
Unsure whether to believe most MPs (Agree)	0.047		0.114	
	(0.160)		(0.103)	
Politicians do whatever they want (Agree)	-0.050		0.132	
	(0.139)		(0.091)	
Intercept	-2.627	**	-2.910	**
	(0.123)		(0.083)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05
(Source: ActEU Survey)

Table 5.9 Self-declared probability of joining protests – Distrust in European and (sub)national MPs – Polarisation on climate change

	Joining a protest (if distrust in EU MPs)		Joining a protest (if distrust in all (sub)national MPs	
Young	0.213		0.409	**
	(0.149)		(0.091)	
MPs distort the facts to make policies look good (Agree)	0.041		0.191	*
	(0.148)		(0.097)	
Uncertain whether or not MPs care about people like me (Agree)	-0.016		-0.036	
	(0.158)		(0.100)	
Unsure if MPs try to make things better or worse (Agree)	0.477	**	-0.033	
	(0.152)		(0.096)	
Unsure whether to believe most MPs (Agree)	0.070		0.093	
	(0.161)		(0.103)	
Politicians do whatever they want (Agree)	-0.082		0.115	
	(0.140)		(0.092)	
Negative feelings towards people believing climate change is human made	-0.188		-0.184	
	(0.250)		(0.168)	
Positive feelings towards people believing climate change is human made	-0.085		-0.148	
	(0.156)		(0.102)	
Negative feelings towards people denying climate change is human made	-0.259		-0.082	
	(0.172)		(0.111)	
Positive feelings towards people denying climate change is human made	0.557	**	0.559	**
	(0.182)		(0.118)	

Fridays for Future flag on local council/assembly (Disagree)	-0.701	*	-0.353	
	(0.351)		(0.238)	
Fridays for Future flag on local council/assembly (Agree)	0.261		0.327	*
	(0.259)		(0.162)	
Fridays for Future flag on national assembly (Disagree)	0.388		-0.116	
	(0.334)		(0.234)	
Fridays for Future flag on national assembly (Agree)	0.257		0.241	
	(0.262)		(0.163)	
Intercept	-2.544	**	-2.823	**
	(0.137)		(0.091)	
Number of observations	3267		9733	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU Survey)

When it comes to the question of approval of those taking part in contentious action, a first indication from the survey stems from answers to questions asking how likely a person would be to join two different kinds of such action. Here the experimental vignette specifically talks about a policy that the respondent disagrees with, and asks whether the respondent would be likely to join either a peaceful demonstration or an occupation of the parliament building. The latter is considered the more contentious in terms of personal cost of the two. The analysis reveals that where opposition to a policy is concerned, political distrust appears to be more important in the general relationship between polarisation, political trust, and protest. Here, those who declared they were likely to join a peaceful demonstration or (in a much more contentious way) an occupation of the parliament building were also more distrustful of MPs at different levels. Those likely to join a peaceful demonstration also saw local MPs as actors that 'distort the facts to make policies look good' and expressed the idea that "it doesn't matter who you vote for, politicians do whatever they want" concerning national MPs. In the analysis of trust in national MPs specifically, being a young respondent is also linked to likelihood to take part in a peaceful demonstration. For the more contentious option, the occupation of the parliament, the analyses on trust in local, regional, and European MPs also showed that being young predicted likely to take part. Seeing local MPs as doing whatever they want, and being unsure whether European MPs try to make things better or worse are also predictors of taking part in more contentious action.

This suggests generalised findings about political trust and contentious participation by pointing to the importance of distrust amongst those who act: the most contentious action seems to be most easy to associate with age. Adding polarisation changes this however – being young no longer matters when polarised opinions come into play. When tested alongside opinions on regional MPs,

positive opinions on both those who believe in anthropogenic climate change and those who deny it increase the likelihood of declaring they are likely to participate in peaceful demonstrations against a policy they disagree with. An even stronger indication of polarisation, when tested alongside opinions on European MPs positive opinions towards climate change deniers and disapproval of the Fridays for Future flag being displayed on a local or national council/assembly also increases this likelihood. Concerning the more contentious action of an occupation, being young not longer explains the likelihood to join, but when tested alongside local, national, European, and "all national" MPs positive feelings towards climate change deniers increases this probability. In addition, when tested alongside regional MPs, approval of displaying the Fridays for Future flag on the national assembly also increases this probability. Overall, this appears to bolster the findings in scholarship on polarisation on climate change in the European context being much sharper on policy questions than on the acceptance or rejection of the existence of anthropogenic climate change. Distrust and polarisation appear important for more contentious action against policy, and this seems to hold even more so where there is opposition to Fridays for Future being supported by a political institution. This would also be in line with findings in social movement studies about grievance theory, which claim that contentious political participation is driven by that feeling.

5.5 Participation, trust, and polarisation on climate change in the web-scraped data

To explore the complex inter-relationships between polarised positions on climate change, political trust and distrust, and different political participation choices further, we can also present some preliminary findings from the ActEU web-scraped data. Specifically, we explore the data from *X* (formerly *Twitter*), which includes information about individual opinions and choices.

Nevertheless, the findings presented here should be taken as indications only. A small sample of the web-scraped data was manually annotated according to the various research interests of the ActEU project in order to guide a second stage of machine coding. A limited manual check of the resulting coding reveals that significant noise – that is to say texts that do not reflect the concepts and ideas expressed in the annotation – remain. It is important to note that the analysis presented here may well indicate general patterns, but further research is needed to better organise and analyse the vast body of data collected via web-scraping.

Our empirical strategy to approach the web-scraped data is as follows. First, we sought to gain a picture of the general evolution of the salience of climate change, but plotting two time-series of tweets annotated as referring to climate change in comparison to all the tweets gathered. These observations were also completed by time-series mentioning, within these two categories of tweets, expressions of political trust and distrust.

We then sought to establish some reliability about whether or not the tweets of common users (accounts not attributed to organisations including interest groups, journalists, politicians and such like) annotated for the expression of pro-climate or climate sceptic content: to identify both kinds of contents, we both selected all tweets dealing with climate change, and we registered as pro-climate the tweets expressing a "positive" discourse on this topic, while labelling as climate sceptic the tweets characterized by a related "negative" stance. We therefore excluded the tweets which, during the web scraping process, were labelled as "neutral" or falling under the category "Other".

To check the previously mentioned reliability level, we looked at the relationships between common user accounts reacting to seed accounts (organisational accounts) annotated for climate sceptic and pro-climate content. We found that the relationships between the two were significant for both. Given that, we then decided to proceed to look at common user tweets annotated as containing language indicative of political distrust, political trust, polarised language on climate change (political trust having a positive effect on ecologist positions and a negative effect on climate sceptic positions, while political distrust being supportive of climate sceptic stances and negatively associated with ecologist positions), and references to different types of political participation including some of those we discussed with reference to the ActEU survey. First, we looked at the relationships suggested by the annotated data about the links between political trust and distrust and climate change positions in different countries, as well as the relationships suggested about climate change positions and different forms of political participation, before adding content on different types of political participation in a second step.

Table 5.10 Political trust and pro-climate content by country (ActEU web-scraped data)

Trust	AT		CZ		DE		DK		ES		FI		FR		GB		IT		PL	
Pro-climate	0.015		0.152	**	0.059	**	0.004		0.020	**	0.144	**	0.019	**	0.031		0.186	**	-0.005	
	(0.013)		(0.034)		(0.006)		(0.037)		(0.004)		(0.017)		(0.005)		(0.020)		(0.015)		(0.022)	
Int.	0.042	**	0.133	**	0.104	**	0.372	**	0.040	**	0.045	**	0.094	**	0.059	**	0.078	**	0.126	**
	(0.007)		(0.017)		(0.003)		(0.014)		(0.002)		(0.009)		(0.003)		(0.012)		(0.005)		(0.007)	
Nb. of obs.	1354		617		16571		1351		12136		1228		17133		730		3929		2628	

(Source: ActEU web-scraped data)

Table 5.11 Political distrust and climate sceptic content by country

Dis-trust	AT		CZ		DE		DK		ES		FI		FR		GB		IT		PL	
Climate sceptic	0.144	**	0.133	**	0.288	**	0.073	**	0.375	**	0.040	*	0.240	**	0.187	**	0.223	**	0.479	**
	(0.022)		(0.035)		(0.007)		(0.022)		(0.008)		(0.019)		(0.007)		(0.035)		(0.014)		(0.017)	
Int.	0.141	**	0.195	**	0.140	**	0.131	**	0.180	**	0.098	**	0.202	**	0.251	**	0.124	**	0.077	**
	(0.016)		(0.023)		(0.005)		(0.018)		(0.005)		(0.014)		(0.005)		(0.023)		(0.010)		(0.014)	
Nb. of obs.	1354		617		16571		1351		12136		1228		17133		730		3929		2628	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU web-scraped data)

The analyses on tweets that the machine annotation classified as containing content indicative of political trust and a positive view on climate change action yielded mixed findings. There appears to be a connection between these for the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Finland, France and Italy, but not for Austria, Denmark, the UK, or Poland. Regarding a relationship between political distrust and contend annotated as climate sceptic, all of the countries displayed a clear relationship between the two. Further work is needed to verify and check the annotation of the data, but these results do find some echoes in the existing literature which points to distrust as a clear contributing factor in climate scepticism at least as far as policy support is concerned.

Table 5.12 Pro-climate content and political participation

	Pro-climate positions									
Conventional protest	-0.040	*								
	(0.019)									
NGO			-0.071	**						
			(0.023)							
Unconventional protest					-0.104	**				
					(0.019)					
Party							0.168	**		
							(0.013)			
Union									0.726	**
									(0.019)	
Austria	0.162	**	0.161	**	0.163	**	0.162	**	0.157	**
	(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.014)	
Czech Republic	0.158	**	0.157	**	0.159	**	0.151	**	0.159	**
	(0.020)		(0.020)		(0.020)		(0.020)		(0.019)	
Germany	0.193	**	0.192	**	0.192	**	0.192	**	0.170	**
	(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)	
Denmark	0.059	**	0.050	**	0.065	**	0.051	**	0.052	**
	(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.014)	
Spain	0.214	**	0.213	**	0.215	**	0.209	**	0.214	**
	(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)	
Finland	0.192	**	0.190	**	0.193	**	0.189	**	0.192	**
	(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.015)	
France	0.179	**	0.178	**	0.179	**	0.175	**	0.179	**
	(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)	
UK	0.252	**	0.252	**	0.253	**	0.247	**	0.252	**
	(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.018)	
Italy	0.012		0.011		0.012		0.005		0.012	
	(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)	
Intercept	0.098	**	0.099	**	0.098	**	0.097	**	0.098	**
	(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.008)	
Number of observations	57677		57677		57677		57677		57677	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU web-scraped data)

Table 5.13 Climate sceptic content and political participation

	Climate sceptic positions									
Conventional protest	-0.058	**								
	(0.022)									
NGO			0.134	**						
			(0.026)							
Unconventional protest					0.064	**				
					(0.022)					
Party							-0.053	**		
							(0.014)			
Union									-0.545	**
									(0.022)	
Intercept	0.644	**	0.641	**	0.644	**	0.644	**	0.644	**
	(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)	
Austria	-0.112	**	-0.109	**	-0.112	**	-0.112	**	-0.108	**
	(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.016)	
Czech Republic	-0.194	**	-0.191	**	-0.194	**	-0.191	**	-0.194	**
	(0.022)		(0.022)		(0.022)		(0.022)		(0.022)	
Germany	-0.116	**	-0.115	**	-0.116	**	-0.116	**	-0.099	**
	(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)	
Denmark	0.015		0.007		-0.003		0.005		0.005	
	(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.016)	
Spain	-0.244	**	-0.242	**	-0.244	**	-0.242	**	-0.244	**
	(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)	
Finland	-0.076	**	-0.075	**	-0.078	**	-0.077	**	-0.078	**
	(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)	
France	-0.098	**	-0.096	**	-0.098	**	-0.097	**	-0.098	**
	(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)	
UK	-0.212	**	-0.214	**	-0.213	**	-0.211	**	-0.213	**
	(0.021)		(0.021)		(0.021)		(0.021)		(0.021)	
Italy	-0.057	**	-0.055	**	-0.057	**	-0.055	**	-0.057	**
	(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)	
Number of observations	57677		57677		57677		57677		57677	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU web-scraped data)

Looking instead at the relationships between climate change positions and references to different modes of political participation, where tweets were annotated as positive about climate change action and information, they were also found to refer to political parties and trade unions, but not to NGOs or any types of protests. Tweets annotated for content indicating climate sceptic positions and descriptions or references to different types of political participation, we find a link to references to NGOs and non-institutional protests, but no strong likelihood to include content on institutional protest, political parties, or trade unions. These results only tell us about what tweets

'talk about' however: the annotation (which requires further checking to eliminate incorrect machine coding decisions) does not inform us about whether the content of tweets referring to different channels of political participation are positive or negative in tone. In other words, ecologists may be talking about political parties and trade unions in negative terms, while climate sceptics may be doing the same in their talk about NGOs and protests. Given the prominent debates about climate change protest strategies as well as prominent non-institutional protests against environmental policies in 2024, there is likely to be a mix of positions here. Further research could seek to untangle this further.

Table 5.14 Political trust, pro-climate content and modes of participation

	Political trust									
Pro-climate	0.041	**	0.041	**	0.041	**	0.010	**	0.042	**
	(0.003)		(0.003)		(0.003)		(0.003)		(0.003)	
NGO			0.243	**						
			(0.016)							
Party					-0.003					
					(0.009)					
Union							0.888	**		
							(0.013)			
Unconventional protest									0.189	**
Conventional protest	0.243	**								
	(0.013)									
Czech Republic	0.040	**	0.044	**	0.040	**	0.045	**	0.039	**
	(0.013)		(0.013)		(0.013)		(0.013)		(0.013)	
Germany	-0.013	*	-0.010		-0.013	*	-0.034	**	-0.012	*
	(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)	
Denmark	0.201	**	0.250	**	0.245	**	0.247	**	0.222	**
	(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)	
Spain	-0.088	**	-0.084	**	-0.088	**	-0.081	**	-0.089	**
	(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)	
Finland	-0.053	**	-0.043	**	-0.047	**	-0.041	**	-0.049	**
	(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)	
France	-0.037	**	-0.029	**	-0.034	**	-0.028	**	-0.034	**
	(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)	
UK	-0.068	**	-0.069	**	-0.066	**	-0.058	**	-0.068	**
	(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)		(0.012)	
Italy	-0.028	**	-0.024	**	-0.027	**	-0.027	**	-0.028	**
	(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)	
Intercept	0.121	**	0.116	**	0.122	**	0.124	**	0.120	**
	(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)	
Number of observations	57677		57677		57677		57677		57677	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: (ActEU web-scraped data)

Adding political trust to the equation changes out findings, though, once more, it should be recalled that these findings are preliminary and based on the machine annotation of the data, which does contain noise. Overall, pro-climate action, trustful tweeters refer to, though this does not necessarily suggest they are uniformly supportive of, a wide range of political participation types. In addition to political parties and trade unions, trust adds NGOs to the list alongside non-conventional protest.

Table 5.15 Political distrust, climate sceptic content and modes of participation

	Political distrust				
Climate sceptic	0.279 **	0.280 **	0.280 **	0.276 **	0.279 **
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
NGO		-0.228 **			
		(0.023)			
Party			0.210 **		
			(0.013)		
Union				-0.137 **	
				(0.019)	
Unconventional protest					-0.076 **
					(0.019)
Conventional protest	-0.108 **				
	(0.019)	-0.141 **	-0.137 **	-0.137 **	-0.137 **
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Czech Republic	-0.077 **	-0.082 **	-0.087 **	-0.078 **	-0.077 **
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Germany	-0.061 **	-0.064 **	-0.062 **	-0.057 **	-0.061 **
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Denmark	-0.189 **	-0.213 **	-0.210 **	-0.209 **	-0.199 **
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Spain	0.012	0.008	0.006	0.012	0.013
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Finland	-0.241 **	-0.248 **	-0.246 **	-0.244 **	-0.243 **
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
France	-0.024 *	-0.029 **	-0.029 **	-0.025 **	-0.025 **

	(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)	
UK	0.006		0.008		-0.001		0.004		0.006	
	(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.018)	
Italy	-0.115	**	-0.119	**	-0.124	**	-0.115	**	-0.115	**
	(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)	
Intercept	0.206	**	0.210	**	0.205	**	0.208	**	0.206	**
	(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.009)	
Number of observations	57677		57677		57677		57677		57677	

** p<.01, * p<.05

(Source: ActEU web-scraped data)

Our findings about the relationship between modes of participation and tweets annotated as showing sceptical content on climate change and action to tackle it, and language indicating political distrust, are as follows (with the same caveats on noise in the annotation). Overall, tweets with climate sceptic content and language indicative of political distrust do not refer to or describe either institutional or non-institutional protest, nor do they refer or describe political participation through NGOs or trade unions. The only relationship suggested by the analysis is content describing or referring to participation through a political party. Distrust therefore changes the previous findings considerably, narrowing references to political participation modes down to political parties alone. This suggests that distrustful and climate sceptic tweets appear to consider political parties as interlocutors or privileged subjects for their comments. Again, the annotation does not tell us if these descriptions or references are positive or negative in tone, which would require further research. Existing literature points to the importance of populist right wing political parties in climate scepticism in Europe which could be one explanation for this finding.

5.6 Conclusion

Our analysis of the interlinkages between political participation, political trust, and polarised positions on climate change began by summarising major existing findings from the literature. Existing scholarship points to the importance of ideology, partisanship and polarisation in explaining positions on climate change policies in Europe. It also suggests that political trust plays an important role in policy support, along with accepting the reality of climate change. A threat to this is identified in right-wing populism, which is found to be particularly problematic for climate policy support as it promotes nationalism and distrust in elites that equate with climate scepticism.

Some scholarship, but not a great deal, points to a link between political distrust and contentious political action. Therefore, our analysis of the survey data, and preliminary analysis of web-scraped data from X, is valuable. The findings presented here indicate a number of avenues for further discussion, though it should be noted that the analysis of the web-scraped data does require further work, including qualitative analysis, to ensure that the annotations indicate the actual content of the corpora. Of particular value are the nuanced findings about the roles of trust and distrust, which we understand as distinct rather than a scale, and about different types of contentious action ranging from more modular demonstrations to more disruptive action.

Our analysis of the ActEU survey revealed a complex picture. Regarding political trust in actors at different levels, no clear relationship emerged between generalised political trust and participating in demonstrations, while in some aspects polarised opinions on climate change do appear to strengthen the relationship between political trust and demonstration participation. There is no clear indication that this relationship between trust and participating in a demonstration refers to either pro- or climate-sceptic action. This is an important finding: people who trust European and national MPs and report different positions on climate change do take part in public demonstrations. The existence of protests and demonstrations does not therefore mean that political actors are uniformly distrusted. There is evidence from the survey about a link between political trust in MPs, favourable opinions of climate denialists, and an increased likelihood to take have taken part in a strike and, in some cases, unauthorised protests. This may be related to increased strikes and other forms of unauthorized protests addressing, in part, European and national environmental protection policies in 2024, signalling the beginning of a backlash to the European Green Deal. This could point to a need for a broader approach to just transition policies and a robust commitment to the Deal. Overall, the analysis focusing on political trust provides some nuanced support for the hypothesised link between high levels of polarisation and the choice to take part in more contentious forms of action: this seems to apply for climate sceptic sympathies and striking in particular so far as political trust levels are concerned.

As mentioned, we do not consider political trust as a single continuum where the absence of trust is read as an automatic indicator of distrust, and thus conducted separate analyses concerning expressions of distrust. We found in our analysis of the ActEU survey that political distrust and indications pointing to climate scepticism play a role in perceptions of contentious action. Specifically, some distrust in European MPs, positive views of climate denialists, and disapproval of support for Fridays for Future increases a declared likelihood to take part in peaceful protest. Distrust in MPs at all levels and positive views of climate denialists increased the likelihood of declaring the intention to take part in occupying a parliament building. Here, analysis of the ESS survey also points to a strong role of political distrust and the likelihood of taking part in unlawful demonstrations for people with a range of positions on climate change. Our findings thus point to a nuanced role for distrust in general for more contentious actions, while political trust shapes more contentious action choices for climate sceptics in particular. Regarding our hypothesis 3a on the relationship between trust, high polarisation, and the acceptability or perceived legitimacy of contentious participation, our analyses indicate support for the hypothesis where political distrust is concerned.

When asking about legitimacy – that is how acceptable different types of contentious action are, however, distrust in local MPs and positive views on factually correct climate change information (i.e. the existence of anthropogenic climate change) led to higher approvals of demonstrations and unauthorised protests. Why the local level emerges as important here requires some further research, but this suggests that political trust also plays a role in the relationship detailed in hypothesis 3a. The ActEU focus group data for Greece indicated a link between the acceptability of unconventional action with positive local level effects, which may be a future avenue worth exploring in this vein.

Our analysis of the web-scraped data focused on X, and relied on the machine annotation of that data which may contain significant 'noise' – our findings should therefore be taken cautiously. Overall, the more reliable data we have from the summer of 2023 strongly suggests that X has

much more climate sceptic content, and that most of that climate sceptic content is linked with political distrust. Adding trust into the analysis, there is some suggestion about trust and pro-climate positions being linked to participation of all kinds amongst X users: pro-climate and trustful users are politically active in a range of different ways. There is also some suggestion that distrust and climate scepticism are linked only to action through political parties. Though this seems to challenge other findings from the survey data, tweets announcing or referring to participation in protest actions deemed unlawful or unauthorised are less likely, while the literature clearly points to strong links to populist right-wing parties and climate scepticism in Europe. In that view, the findings are not necessarily contradictory. Overall, however these are very tentative findings to be pursued further.

6 Policy section II: migration. The link between polarisation around immigration and diversity, political trust and political participation

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6.1 Introduction

There is little doubt that public debates about immigration, the policies designed and implemented to manage it, and the social diversity that it generates are among the most politicised across Europe. The politicisation of a policy field or issue implies the joint presence of high salience (attention) to the policy field or issue and a high level of polarisation (disagreement and conflict) around the best policy approaches to tackle the field or issue (van der Brug et al. 2015). Extant scholarship on public debates on immigration has repeatedly shown that immigration is both salient and polarised across nearly all – if not all (see Carvalho and Duarte 2020) European countries and at the EU institutional level (Castelli Gattinara and Morales 2017, Hutter and Kriesi 2022).

The politicisation and ensuing polarisation of immigration can happen — and tends to do so — at several levels: public and media debates, institutional decision-making arenas and among ordinary citizens. Research has focused on each of these levels somewhat separately for analytical convenience reasons: the methodological tools and approaches to examine public debates are typically different to those employed to examine decision-making arenas, and are different as well to those used to assess citizens' attitudes.

Research on public and media debates has shown a consistent and sustained politicisation of immigration that varies across countries but has tended to grow across all of them in the last 20 years, with peaks of politicisation being reached during or after the inflow of Syrian refugees in 2015 (van der Brug et al. 2015, Kriesi et al. 2008, Hutter and Kriesi 2022). It also shows that politicisation trends tend to be somewhat detached from underlying demographic flows and pressures and are primarily driven by political entrepreneurship, particularly by radical right populist parties (Grande et al. 2019) and conservative media outlets (Reddy and Thiollet 2023).

Closely related to research on public and media debates, another strand of research has focused on political elites and, especially, on political parties as key political actors (e.g., Alonso and Claro da Fonseca 2012, Ruedin and Morales 2019, Williams and Hunger 2022). Findings show that the salience and polarisation of immigration have been growing over time, now affect a larger number of parties and that anti-immigrant challenger parties (primarily radical right populist parties) are able to force mainstream parties (primarily conservative and social democratic parties) into accommodative strategies.

The literature on the salience and polarisation of citizens' attitudes towards immigration, migrants and diversity is extremely vast and has rapidly expanded in the last 20 years. A recurrent discussion in the scholarship on citizens' attitudes towards immigration, migrants and diversity is whether these are primarily driven by perceptions of threat (group threat or individualised threat) or by intergroup exposure and contact.

Researchers emphasising threat or ethnic competition mechanisms show that individuals (typically in the 'native' or 'ethnic majority' groups) with more vulnerable socio-economic positions — in the labour market or the housing market, for example — tend to display stronger anti-immigrant and anti-diversity sentiments (Semyonov et al. 2006, Lahav et al. 2013, Gorodzeisky and Semionov 2018). The losers of globalisation — the argument goes — oppose immigration and diversity, whereas the winners of globalisation have less restrictive views on immigration and tend

to be more cosmopolitan (Kriesi et al. 2008). Despite initial research findings on the matter (Quillian 1995), more recent studies indicate that threat perceptions are not necessarily (primarily) about sheer numbers of migrants —and some researchers have found little connection between the real or perceived size of migrant populations and citizens' attitudes (Hjerm 2011). Studies also find that perceptions of threat can be primarily related to perceptions about resource allocation, crime, cultural values and national identity (McLaren and Johnson 2007, Fitzgerald et al. 2012, Hiers et al. 2017). This does not mean that the pace and magnitude of immigration inflows are irrelevant. Indeed, recent studies have suggested that immigration levels can have backlash effects on the population that last in the medium term (Claassen and McLaren 2022).

Researchers emphasising the relevance of intergroup exposure and contact show that, regardless of socio-economic position, the geographical concentration of migrants and minorities matters and that those who more vehemently oppose immigration, migrants and diversity are those who live in areas with fewer migrants and minorities and, as a consequence, have less contact and knowledge of them (Alba and Foner 2017, McLaren et al. 2021). Recent studies suggest that the interplay of intergroup contact and intergroup competition and threat is a complex one that is highly context-dependent and can offset each other, such that contact has positive effects up to a certain threshold of concentration, beyond which the perceptions of local area deterioration can introduce perceptions of threat (Weber 2019).

Nevertheless, there is abundant evidence showing that core political and ideological preferences structure attitudes towards immigration, migrants and diversity for a large share of the citizenry, meaning that left-right positions account for a considerable portion of attitudes towards immigration, migrants and diversity (e.g., Pardos-Prado 2011). Research also shows that public and media debates, as well as party cues, shape citizens' attitudes (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007, Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009, Vliegenthart et al. 2012, McLaren et al. 2018, Vrânceanu and Lachat 2021, Williams and Hunger 2022, Schmidt-Catran and Czymara 2023, Vrânceanu 2024, Schneider-Strawczynski and Valette 2025), thus polarisation at one level tends to trickle down or up to other spheres.

While research on the politicisation of immigration and diversity is very extensive, the scholarship connecting immigration attitudes to political trust is less abundant. Lauren McLaren has developed a research line on this link (McLaren 2012, 2013, 2017) and suggests that discrepancies between citizens' attitudes towards immigration, conceptions of nationhood and immigration policies tend to depress political trust. These findings for Europe are consistent with findings for the US that suggest that Americans who are more politically trustful are also those who tend to be more supportive of pro-immigration policies (Macdonald 2021); findings later replicated for Europe as well (Macdonald and Cornacchione 2023). Interestingly, while there is a link at the individual level of attitudes, Claassen (2024) finds that immigration statistics bear no impact on trends in political trust, and Jeannet (2020) finds an effect exclusively for individuals with anti-immigration attitudes. Jointly considered, this body of evidence suggests that the primary mechanism lies at the level of public opinion and political orientation formation.

Though not exclusively connected to trust in EU institutions, a considerable body of literature has also examined the link between attitudes towards immigration, migrants and diversity and support for the EU, voting in EP elections or EU enlargement (see a summary in Kentmen-Cin and Erisen 2017). Given the open borders policy within the EU of the European integration project and the increasing powers allocated to the EU in the coordination of migration and border-control governance, this connection is not too surprising. In fact, it is a connection made explicit by the

anti-immigration positions and discourses of radical right populist parties, which converge around both anti-immigration and anti-EU positions and are primarily distinctive from other parties on these two issues (see findings of the ActEU project in Kratochvíl et al. 2024). Research also shows that media attention and the polarised tone of such attention around EU vs national government conflicts around immigration contributes to the further polarisation of citizens' attitudes (van Klingeren et al. 2017).

Nevertheless, this review of scholarship indicates that research on the association between attitudes towards immigration and political trust has not focused specifically on examining polarisation dynamics as such.

Compared to the previous literature discussed, the scholarship directly connecting polarisation dynamics around immigration and individual political participation is relatively scarce. Undoubtedly, there is considerable literature on collective action supporting migrants (see a summary in Monforte and Morales 2018) and on collective action against immigration and migrants, particularly from far-right parties and movements (Castelli Gattinara et al. 2022, Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2024, Pirro et al. 2024). Yet, research examining the connection at the individual level is uncommon. Roblain and Green (2021) are an exception and they find some connection that they attribute to the identity dynamics triggered by the increased polarisation of immigration.

This chapter examines how the polarisation of attitudes and discourses on immigration, migrants and diversity shapes the link between political trust and political participation. To this end, we first present our measures of the polarisation of attitudes towards immigration, political trust and political participation (section 7.2), next we provide a cross-national overview of the relation between these three aspects of political orientations and behaviour using data from the last 20 years of the European Social Survey (section 7.3), to then zoom in to the results of the ActEU survey for 10 European countries in 2024 (section 7.4) and then zoom out with an analysis of public discourse dynamics on social media (section 7.5). The final section provides a succinct summary and discussion of key findings presented in this chapter.

6.2 The measurement of polarisation around immigration and diversity, political trust and political participation

Attitudes towards immigration, migrants and diversity are not unidimensional (Kwon et al. 2024). Citizens position themselves differently depending on what aspect of immigration one is asking about, the kind of migrants one is referring to and the nature of diversity being considered. The existing scholarship demonstrates that attitudes relating to migration tend to be structured along two distinct dimensions: one connected to economic or material benefits/threats and another connected to psychological or cultural benefits/threats (see López-Yagüe and Morales 2023 for a summary). Among the latter, analyses of survey data have found that ethnic/racial prejudice and stereotyping are a relevant component that displays specific characteristics, allowing further distinguishing among those with nativist orientations based on the relative emphasis of symbolic boundaries (Heath and Richards 2020, Ford and Mellon 2020, Ramos et al. 2020).

For these reasons, when designing the new survey conducted by the ActEU project team in 10 European countries (Reinl et al. 2024), three survey questions included in all rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) were retained from a systematic examination of this dimensionality of attitudes towards immigration (see López-Yagüe and Morales 2023 for the full details):

1. Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries? (response scale: 0 = bad for the economy; 10 = good for the economy);
2. Is [country] made a worse or better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? (response scale: 0 = worse place to live; 10 = better place to live);
3. To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people to come and live here? (response scale: 1 = allow many to come and live here; 2 = allow some; 3 = allow a few; 4 = allow none).

These three items will form the core of our measures of attitudes towards immigration throughout this chapter, including for the measurement of polarisation on immigration, as they have the advantage of being present both in the 10 rounds of the ESS – allowing for a longitudinal analysis of trends across Europe – and the ActEU survey.

Nevertheless, in section 7.4 we also consider other indicators included in the ActEU survey regarding orientations towards immigration through a vignette experiment.

Our aim is, thus, to examine with this range of indicators the extent to which immigration is polarised in Europe, how has this polarisation varied over time and what are its consequences. Given public debates on immigration, we expect sizeable levels of polarisation, but as Kwon et al. (2024) show, although there are large shares of the population across Europe that hold polarised views about immigration, migrants and diversity, the largest share in European populations is formed by those who hold ambivalent views.

In this chapter we examine the connection between political trust and participation and how it is shaped by attitudes towards migration and diversity, hence the measurement of political trust is also relevant. As discussed in Deliverable 2.1 (Christensen et al. 2024), there are many indicators of political trust that can be used but we are often constrained by those that are present in the surveys we analyse. As shown in Deliverable 2.1, the extant evidence suggests that there are two sufficiently distinct dimensions of political trust: towards national actors and institutions and EU actors and institutions. Consequently, in this chapter, we examine separately the association between national political trust and EU political trust with political participation, and how it is moderated by polarisation on immigration.

For the analyses in section 7.3, where we draw on the ESS, we use on the one hand one item on trust in the European Parliament and, on the other, an average index of trust in the national parliament, political parties, politicians and the legal system. By contrast, for the analyses in section 7.4, where we draw on the ActEU survey, we use an average index of political trust from a battery of 11 items that covers trust in local, regional, national and EU actors and institutions. For the parsimony of the presentation of results regarding the survey experiment (vignette), we do not separate across levels of government as the resulting average index has a robust Cronbach's alpha value of 0.95.

Finally, following the examination of ways of capturing political participation with cross-national survey data presented in D3.2 (Pamies et al. 2024), for the over-time analyses with the ESS in

section 7.3, we measure political participation by considering the participation of respondents in any of the following four forms of political action: signing petitions, wearing badges, contacting politicians, boycotting products and participating in demonstrations. For the analyses employing the ActEU survey in section 7.4, we use a vignette experiment that distinguished between participating in an online petition, in a campaign to email MPs (i.e., contacting a politician), in a peaceful demonstration and the occupation of the parliament building.

6.3 The wider picture: How polarisation around immigration and diversity relates to political trust and political participation over time

To examine the wider picture, we rely on the European Social Survey (ESS), since it includes questions relating to attitudes towards immigration, political participation and political trust over time and across countries. The selection includes all 11 biennial rounds of the ESS (2002-2023),[5] and all the countries with complete data for the 11 rounds in at least two indicators.[6] The set of countries analysed includes Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands.[7] All the estimates are calculated using the appropriate weights, following the ESS weighting guide (Kaminska 2020).

The analyses include three specific questions that capture different pro- and anti-immigration attitudes. The first one asks whether the respondent thinks that immigration is bad or good for the country's economy, the second asks if the respondent believes that immigrants make the country a worse or better place to live and, finally, the third question prompts respondents to answer to what extent they think that people of a different race or ethnic group from the one living in the respondent's country should be allowed to come and live in the country.

The first two questions are measured on 11-point scales (0-10): 0 being the negative side of the formulation (bad for the economy / worse place to live) and 10 being the positive (good for the economy / better place to live). The third question about allowing people of a different ethnic group into the country is a 4-point scale (1-4), 1 being allowing many to come and live and 4 allowing none. In order to harmonize the scales, the third question has been reversed and rescaled, so that values in the original scale take values 0, 4, 6, and 10. 0 means "allow none", 4 means "allow a few", 6 means "allow some", and 10 means "allow many".

6.3.1 Polarisation around immigration and diversity

Figure 6.1 shows the distribution of the three variables capturing attitudes towards immigration. If we examine the distribution for the first variable on the perceived impact of immigration in the economy we find a relatively stable pattern, with the median around 5 during most of the period analysed (first 8 rounds, out of 11) and the interquartile range (25%-75%) around 3 and 7 in all ESS rounds except in the last two. For this variable, we find that both the median and the bulk of respondents had slightly less positive attitudes in the first rounds (the more negative being the second round of 2004-2006), while in recent years it appears to be a more positive view on the impact of immigration in the economy, with the median around 6 and the upper side of the

[5] The ESS 2023 study is the 11th round and covers 2023 and 2024.

[6] Hungary is the only country in which one of the questions has not been asked in every round (third question about allowing many/few immigrants, round 9 of 2018).

[7] In graphs, the alphabetical ordering of countries is, instead, the order by ISO alpha-2 country code.

interquartile range around 8, compared to 7 between 2006 and 2018, and 6 between 2002 and 2004.

Looking at the second measure with the same 0-10 scale but on attitudes towards the effect of immigration on the country as a whole, we find remarkably similar results to the previous variable, albeit slightly less positive. The first two rounds of 2002 and 2004 show the same results, but starting in round 3 we start seeing some differences. In that round, the dispersion is smaller and less positive, while in 2010 we also find a lower dispersion, but on both sides of the scale. The only occasion in which respondents are visibly more pro-immigration compared to the previous variable on the effect of immigration on the economy is in 2014, with quartiles one and two (25%-50%) around 4 and 5, compared to 3 and 5 for the first variable. In the most recent waves (2020-2023) the median and the third quartile for attitudes regarding immigration and its effects on the country as an attractive place to live in are one unit below the median than in the variable on the economy, suggesting less favourable views concerning the effect of immigration on the country as a whole.

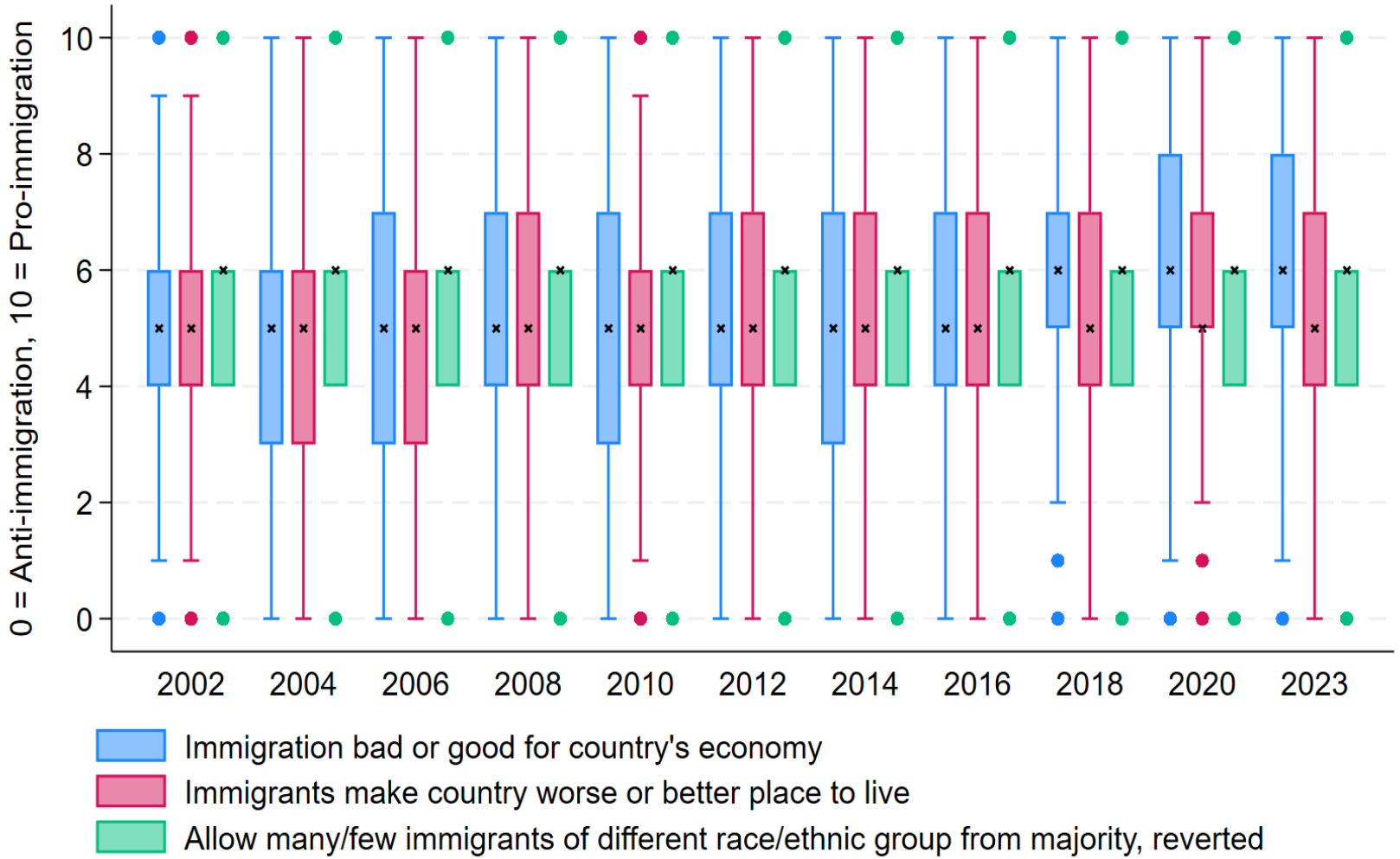
The narrower scale in the third variable on allowing (or not) immigrants of races or ethnic groups different from the majority in the country offers less room for potential variation over time. In all the ESS rounds from 2002 to 2023 the median value is the category 'allowing some' immigrants of different racial/ethnic groups in the country, and the majority of respondents chose either this option or the one immediately below in the scale, which entails allowing a few. This means that the other two options are more residual, both the one allowing none (0 in the recoded scale) and the one allowing many (10 in that same recoded scale).

Figure 6.2 plots the distribution of the same variables breaking them down by countries. The first indicator on immigration and the economy (in blue) shows interesting country differences in the scores. Looking at the upper quartiles of the distribution, we find that the countries with more pro-immigration stances are Switzerland (8 waves at 8 points on the scale out of 10), Ireland (5 waves), Germany, Great Britain and Spain (4 waves), followed closely by Portugal (3). On the other hand, in countries such as Hungary the median and the third quartile are equal or below 5 in all waves but one (6 points out of 10 in 2012), while in Slovenia the third quartile is generally between 5 and 6, which is below the 6 to 8 in the rest of countries. The overall trend is generally upwards, with more pro-immigration positions in recent years, but we also find noticeable fluctuations in the two southern European countries (Spain and Portugal), Ireland and Poland.=

The second set of boxes and whiskers in red graphically represents the median, quartiles and outliers for the second question on immigration and the quality of life in the country. Ireland, Spain and Great Britain are again among the countries with more pro-immigration positions, with Norway and Poland also scoring higher, and Sweden being the country with more positive responses towards immigration. In some of these countries, such as Spain, the scores are often below the first indicator on immigration and the economy (for instance, in 2002, 2006 and 2018), but in most of these countries, the median and quartiles for these two variables are similar across the period analysed. Countries with more clearly anti-immigration positions for this item include Hungary, Portugal and Slovenia. In Hungary, the respondents tend to be slightly more positive towards the effects of immigration on the quality of life in the country as compared to the effects on the economy, while in Portugal and Slovenia the opposite is true, with respondents being by and large more positive about the impact of immigrants in the economy. As the aggregate figure showed, the positions on immigration and quality of life in the country tend to be less positive

(particularly in countries like Switzerland, France and Portugal), but it should also be noted that in countries such as Poland or Sweden, the opposite occurs.

Figure 6. 1.Distribution of three attitudes towards immigration in Europe, over time (2002-2023)

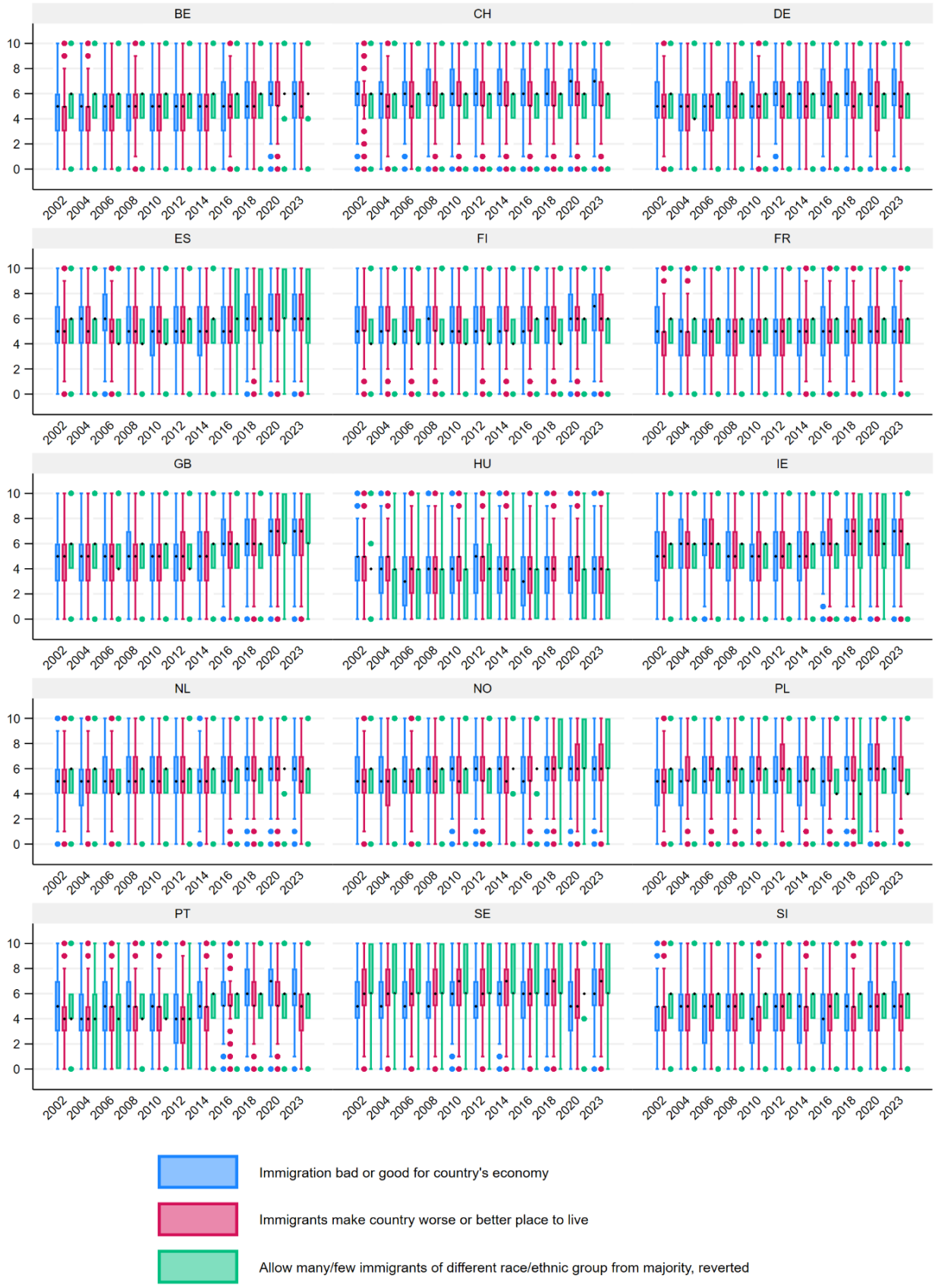


(Source: Own elaboration using the European Social Survey (R1-11). Note: the 'x' symbol depicts the value of the median. Weighted data).

The last set of visualisations by countries focuses on the third variable about opinions on allowing (or not) immigrants of races or ethnic groups different from the majority in the country. In many countries such as Switzerland, Germany, Finland, France and Slovenia there are virtually no differences over time (IQR between 4 and 6 for all the waves, and median generally at 6), and for many other countries, this is also the case in almost all waves (Belgium, Netherlands and Poland). However, we also find very dissimilar patterns in countries like Sweden and Hungary, which were already the most extreme cases in the previous two variables. In Sweden, for all the ESS rounds most of the respondents chose the two most pro-immigration options (allowing some or many), while in Hungary it is the opposite in almost all waves, being the options of allowing none or few the preferred ones. There is a group of countries in which there is noticeable variation over time, mostly towards more positive views. This is the case of Spain from 2016 onwards, Norway from 2018, the United Kingdom in the last two rounds starting in 2020, and also in two more recent rounds in Ireland (2018 and 2020), although not in the most recent one of 2023. This suggests that since 2018-2020 there has been a positive trend towards pro-immigration attitudes regarding allowing immigrants of different ethnic and racial groups in a considerable number of countries.

Analysing the polarisation around immigration issues gives us further information about the extent to which we find opposing views on these same questions. In Table 6.1 and Figure 6.3, we show the evolution over time in the polarisation scores, as captured by cluster-polarisation coefficients (Mehlhaff 2024). This provides a more accurate representation of polarisation than other common measures, such as differences-in-differences or standard measures of variance and allows for the use of a single measurement that combines the three questions capturing attitudes towards immigration.

Figure 6. 2. Distribution by country of three attitudes towards immigration over time



(Source: Own elaboration using the European Social Survey (R1-11). Note: the 'x' symbol depicts the value of the median. Weighted data.)

Looking at Table 6.1 we find that the five countries with the highest levels of polarisation have scores of 0.45 or above, and include Great Britain (0.48), Hungary (0.47), Sweden (0.46), Ireland and France (0.45), and the five countries with lowest levels of polarisation are the Netherlands (0.37), Poland and Switzerland (0.38), Norway (0.40) and Belgium (0.41). The mean is 0.43, with Germany, Finland, Portugal and Slovenia below the mean (less polarised than the mean, taking into account the third decimal) and Spain above. It is worth mentioning that there seems to be no clear relationship between attitudes towards migration and polarisation around the issue, at least using these variables. In Switzerland and Norway, which are some of the most pro-immigration countries, the levels of polarisation are the lowest, while in Sweden and Hungary, the levels of polarisation around immigration are high while being the most (Sweden) and the least (Hungary) pro-immigration of all the 15 countries.

Figure 6.3 offers a visual representation of the same data, as well as a trend line that facilitates the interpretation of changes over time within countries. Most countries have very stable levels of polarisation around immigration over time: France, Great Britain, Slovenia and Switzerland are some of the most stable ones. Several countries have stable trends but at slightly higher levels of polarisation around immigration over time, like Germany and Ireland. The rest of the countries display either increasing or decreasing levels of polarisation around immigration. The group of countries with increasing levels of polarisation include Spain and Hungary, with around 0.1 points of increase, while in Portugal, the Netherlands and Belgium polarisation appears to be in decline. In Portugal, the decline is evident (even with the outlier case of relatively high levels of polarisation in 2012), and in the Netherlands levels of polarisation around migration in the last round of 2023 are much lower than throughout the rest of the period.

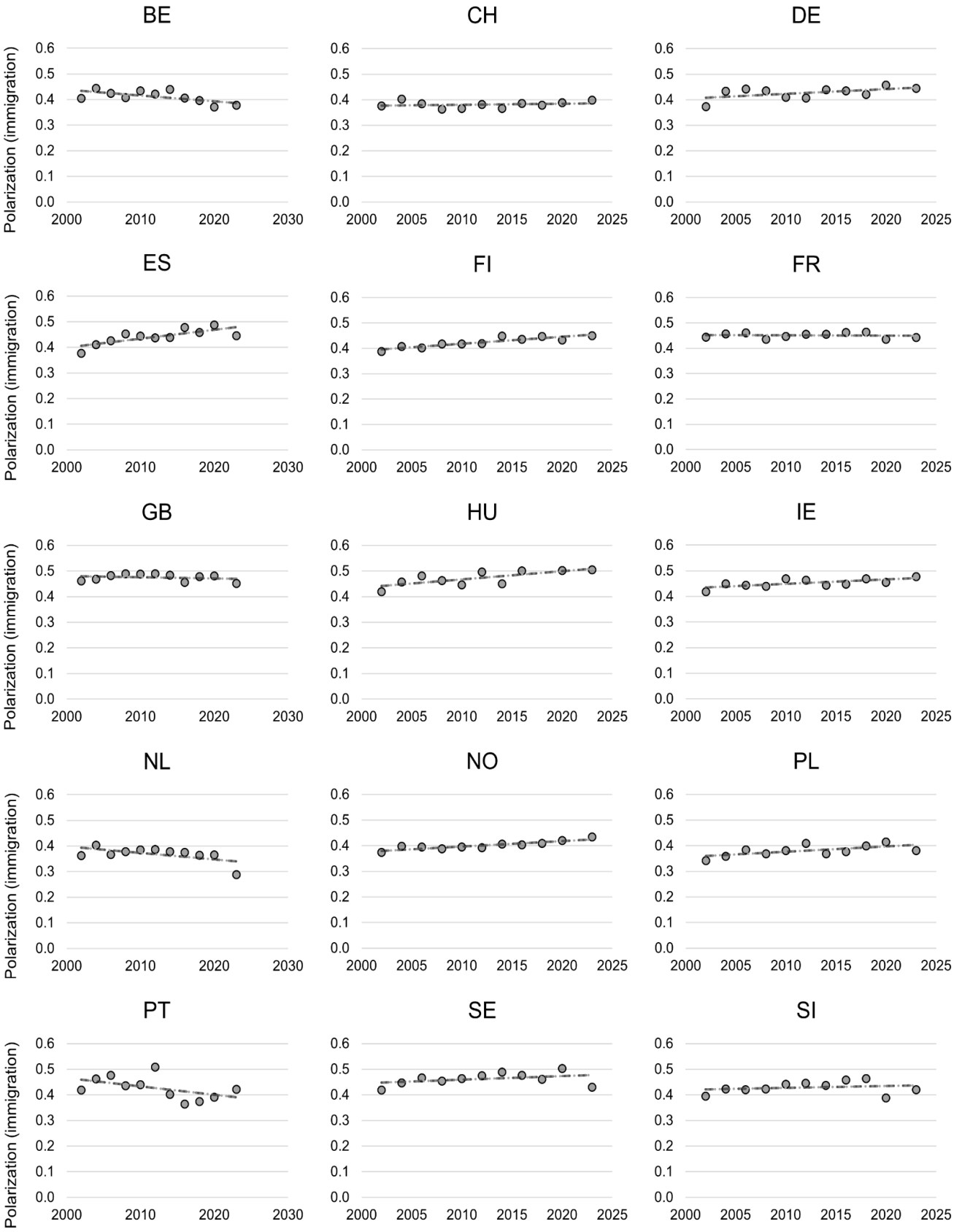
All in all, even if these analyses of the degree and trends in polarisation around immigration provide us with some country and over-time variation, the evidence suggests that polarisation does not seem to correlate with the positionality of pro- or anti-immigration attitudes.

Table 6. 1. Evolution of polarisation around immigration (cluster-polarisation coefficient and item means) by country and year

	BE	CH	DE	ES	FI	FR	GB	HU	IE	NL	NO	PL	PT	SE	SI	Mean
2002	0.40	0.38	0.37	0.38	0.39	0.44	0.46	0.42	0.42	0.36	0.37	0.34	0.42	0.42	0.39	**0.40**
2004	0.44	0.40	0.43	0.41	0.41	0.46	0.47	0.46	0.45	0.40	0.40	0.36	0.46	0.45	0.42	**0.43**
2006	0.42	0.38	0.44	0.43	0.40	0.46	0.48	0.48	0.44	0.37	0.39	0.38	0.48	0.47	0.42	**0.43**
2008	0.41	0.36	0.43	0.45	0.42	0.44	0.49	0.46	0.44	0.38	0.39	0.37	0.44	0.45	0.42	**0.42**
2010	0.43	0.37	0.41	0.44	0.42	0.45	0.49	0.45	0.47	0.39	0.40	0.38	0.44	0.46	0.44	**0.43**
2012	0.42	0.38	0.41	0.44	0.42	0.46	0.49	0.50	0.46	0.39	0.39	0.41	0.51	0.47	0.45	**0.44**
2014	0.44	0.37	0.44	0.44	0.45	0.46	0.48	0.45	0.44	0.38	0.41	0.37	0.40	0.49	0.44	**0.43**
2016	0.41	0.39	0.43	0.48	0.44	0.46	0.46	0.50	0.45	0.37	0.40	0.38	0.36	0.48	0.46	**0.43**
2018	0.40	0.38	0.42	0.46	0.45	0.46	0.48	N/A	0.47	0.36	0.41	0.40	0.37	0.46	0.46	**0.43**
2020	0.37	0.39	0.46	0.49	0.43	0.44	0.48	0.50	0.45	0.36	0.42	0.42	0.39	0.50	0.39	**0.43**
2023	0.38	0.40	0.44	0.45	0.45	0.44	0.45	0.50	0.48	0.29	0.43	0.38	0.42	0.43	0.42	**0.42**
Mean	**0.41**	**0.38**	**0.43**	**0.44**	**0.42**	**0.45**	**0.48**	**0.47**	**0.45**	**0.37**	**0.40**	**0.38**	**0.43**	**0.46**	**0.43**	**0.43**
Avg. Eco	4.84	6.08	5.55	5.53	5.51	4.91	4.99	3,68	5.45	5.22	5.69	5.30	5.16	5.52	4.41	5.23
Avg. Live	4.87	5.46	5.06	5.32	5.56	4.75	4.95	3.96	5.71	5.25	5.49	5.71	4.43	6.20	4.57	5.17
Avg. Allow	5.27	5.65	5.76	5.66	5.00	5.28	5.10	3.08	5.36	5.49	6.10	5.35	4.43	6.92	5.22	5.35

Source: Own elaboration using the European Social Survey (R1-11), calculated using the Mehlhaff cluster-polarisation coefficient. Note: the row averages of "Eco", "Live", and "Allow" refer to the means for each of the three items capturing immigration in their original scales.

Figure 6. 3.Evolution of polarisation around immigration (cluster-polarisation coefficient) by country and year



(Source: Own elaboration, using the European Social Survey (R1-11) and calculated using the Mehlhaff cluster-polarisation coefficient.)

6.3.2 Assessing the link between polarisation, participation and political trust cross-nationally

In this section, we address the question of how the correlation between polarisation on immigration and political participation, moderated by political trust, varies across countries. In order to examine this three-variable relationship we created a measure of how polarised every individual respondent is regarding the three items on immigration/diversity. This is done by calculating the Mahalanobis and Euclidean distances of each respondent to the multivariate distribution of the three items on immigration/diversity (within the respondent's own country and ESS round), which gives a unique value for each respondent that summarises how far away each respondent is from the multivariate mean for that country/round. As far as the trust variables are concerned, we classify all respondents into the following categories:

- Low trust in the European Parliament (EP) and in national actors/institutions
  - Values for EP trust: 0-4
  - Value for national trust (index): 0-4
- High EP trust, but low national trust
  - Values for EP trust: 5-10
  - Value for national trust (index): 0-4
- Low EP trust, but high national trust
  - Values for EP trust: 0-4
  - Value for national trust (index): 5-10
- High EP and national trust
  - Values for EP trust: 5-10
  - Value for national trust (index): 5-10

Following the selection of items for non-electoral political participation in D3.2 of the ActEU project (Pamies et al. 2024), we used the variables capturing signing petitions, wearing badges, contacting politicians, boycotting products and participating in demonstrations, which we recode to create a new variable measuring whether the respondent has participated in any of these five forms (= 1) or has not participated in any of them (= 0).

We then proceed to calculate a logistic regression specified such that the outcome is the dichotomous variable on political participation, and the predictors are the Mahalanobis distance for the respondent, the trust variables, the interaction between the Mahalanobis distance and each trust variable, as well as controls for gender, age, education, urbanicity and ESS round, using the appropriate weights included in the ESS.

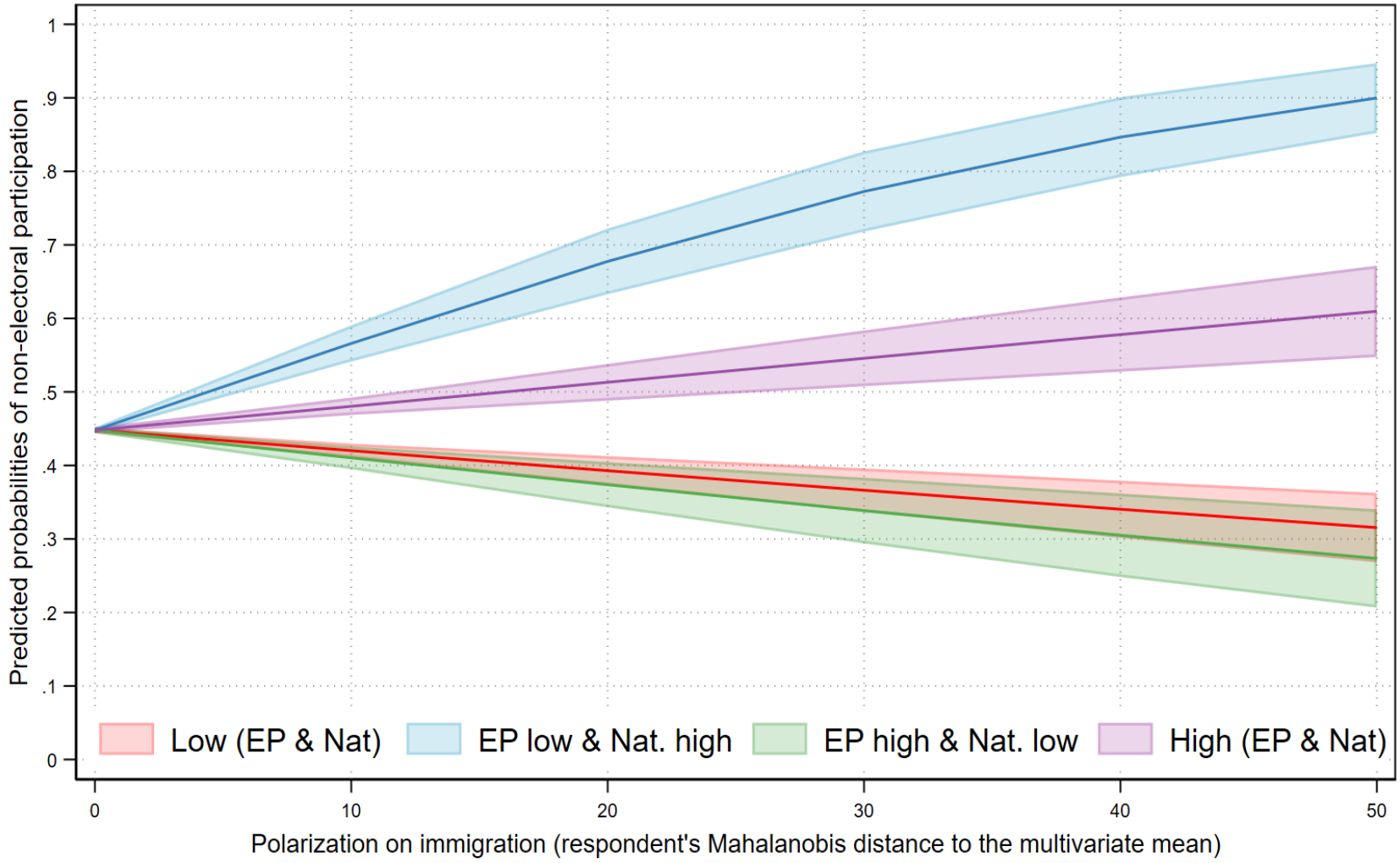
In order to facilitate the visualisation of the regression model, we plot the estimated probability of participation (vertical axis) by the respective distance measure (horizontal axis) for each of the four categories of political trust. We plot first in **Figure 6.4** the predicted probabilities with confidence intervals for the pooled set of all 15 countries included in this chapter using the Mahalanobis distance (**Figure 6.5** plots the predicted probabilities using the Euclidean distance), after which we subplot each country in **Figure 6.6** and **6.7** using the same underlying data.

The predicted probabilities of engaging in non-electoral participation in **Figure 6.4** show that respondents with high trust in national-level institutions tend to participate more in non-electoral activities when they hold more polarised attitudes towards immigration within their national

context. This probability is higher when the high levels of trust in national institutions are combined with low levels of trust in the European Parliament (blue line), which means that high political trust in all types of institutions does not seem to be necessarily associated with higher non-electoral participation. Conversely, those who trust their national-level institutions to a lesser extent tend to participate less as their levels of polarisation towards immigration increase. Again, we cannot make the assumption that the effect of trust is additive or congruent, since trusting less both the EP and the national level institutions (red line) does not seem to negatively affect the levels of participation as compared to those who trust the EP but do not trust national institutions.

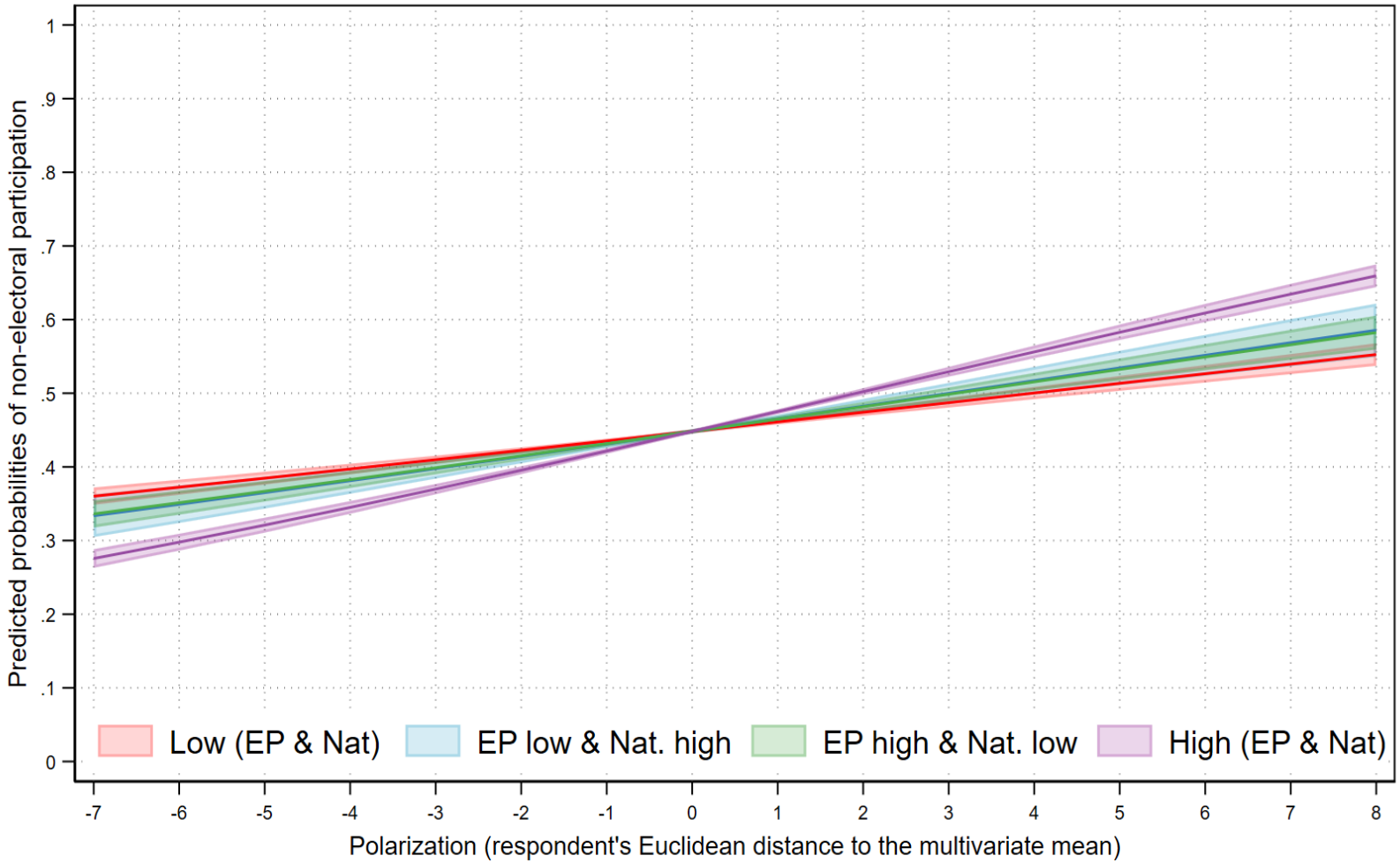
Figure 6.5 helps us to assess separately the effect of attitudes towards migration for those who hold anti-immigrant attitudes (left side) and those who hold pro-immigrant attitudes (right side). Holding pro-immigration attitudes increases the probability of non-electoral participation while holding anti-immigration attitudes decreases this probability. This is true irrespective of the levels of trust, although those who trust more their national level institutions tend to be more affected in their levels of non-electoral participation than those who trust the national institutions of their countries less. In this case, however, those who highly trust both national and EU institutions are indeed more sensitive to the varying levels of polarisation, since they tend to participate more than any other group the more polarised they are, and less than any other group the less polarised they are.

Figure 6. 4. Predicted probabilities of participating by polarisation on immigration (Mahalanobis distance) and levels of trust in 15 countries



(Source: Own elaboration using the European Social Survey (R1-11). Note: weighted data.)

Figure 6. 5.Predicted probabilities of participating by polarisation on immigration (Euclidean distance) and levels of trust in 15 countries



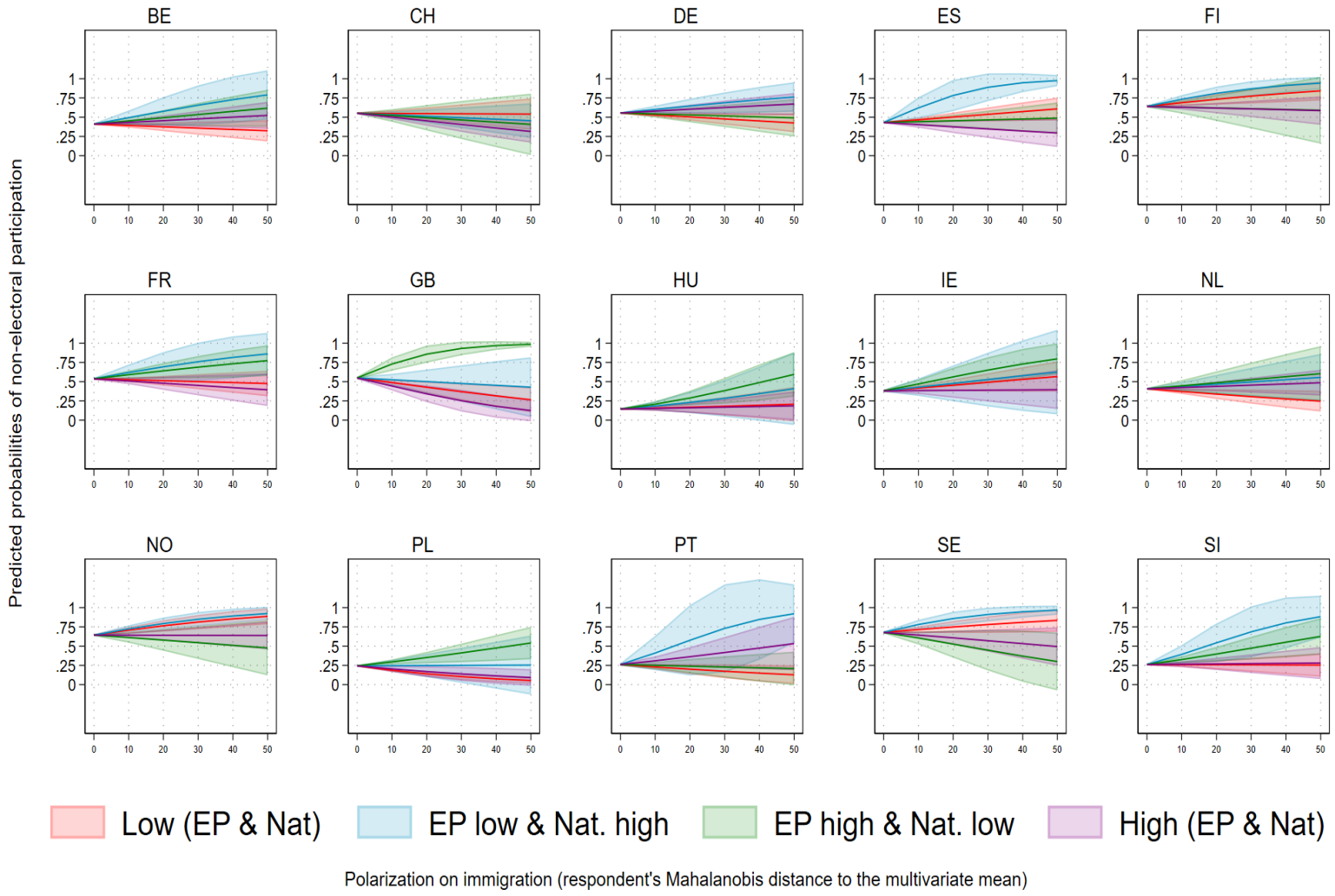
(Source: Own elaboration using the European Social Survey (R1-11). Note: higher positive values mean pro-immigration attitudes more distant to the multivariate mean and higher negative values mean anti-immigration attitudes more distant to the multivariate mean. Weighted data.)

Figure 6.6 plots the predicted probabilities by countries using the same calculations for the Mahalanobis distances of the polarisation on immigration as in Figure 6.4. The plot shows again how individuals with high trust in the national level institutions, particularly those who also hold relatively low levels of trust in the EP (in blue), tend to be more likely to engage in non-electoral participation when they hold more polarised views on immigration. Respondents with high trust both in the EP and national institutions (purple) are again not as clearly linked to higher participation as the previous group. In fact, in a considerable number of countries (7 out of 15) like Switzerland, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Hungary or Ireland, this is the group least inclined to participate when respondents are more polarised around immigration. However, those who trust national institutions to a lesser extent (in red and green) are generally among those with lower levels of participation. Some of the exceptions include Great Britain, Hungary and Poland (higher non-electoral participation for those who highly trust in the EP and have low trust in national institutions), while not a single country shows more participation for those who have lower levels of trust for the EP and national institutions, except marginally in Switzerland.

Finally, Figure 6.7 corresponds to Figure 6.5, plotting this time the Euclidean distance for the polarisation on immigration. Again, respondents who trust the national institutions but not the EP tend to be more affected in their levels of participation by their relative position on polarisation. This is particularly clear in Spain, Portugal and Slovenia while in countries like Hungary these respondents do not seem to be affected by their levels of polarisation around immigration. The nil relationships between polarisation and participation are also clear for other countries and categories of trust. In Norway, individuals with low trust do not behave differently depending on their polarisation around immigration, and in Portugal, this occurs for high trusting individuals, although to a lesser extent.

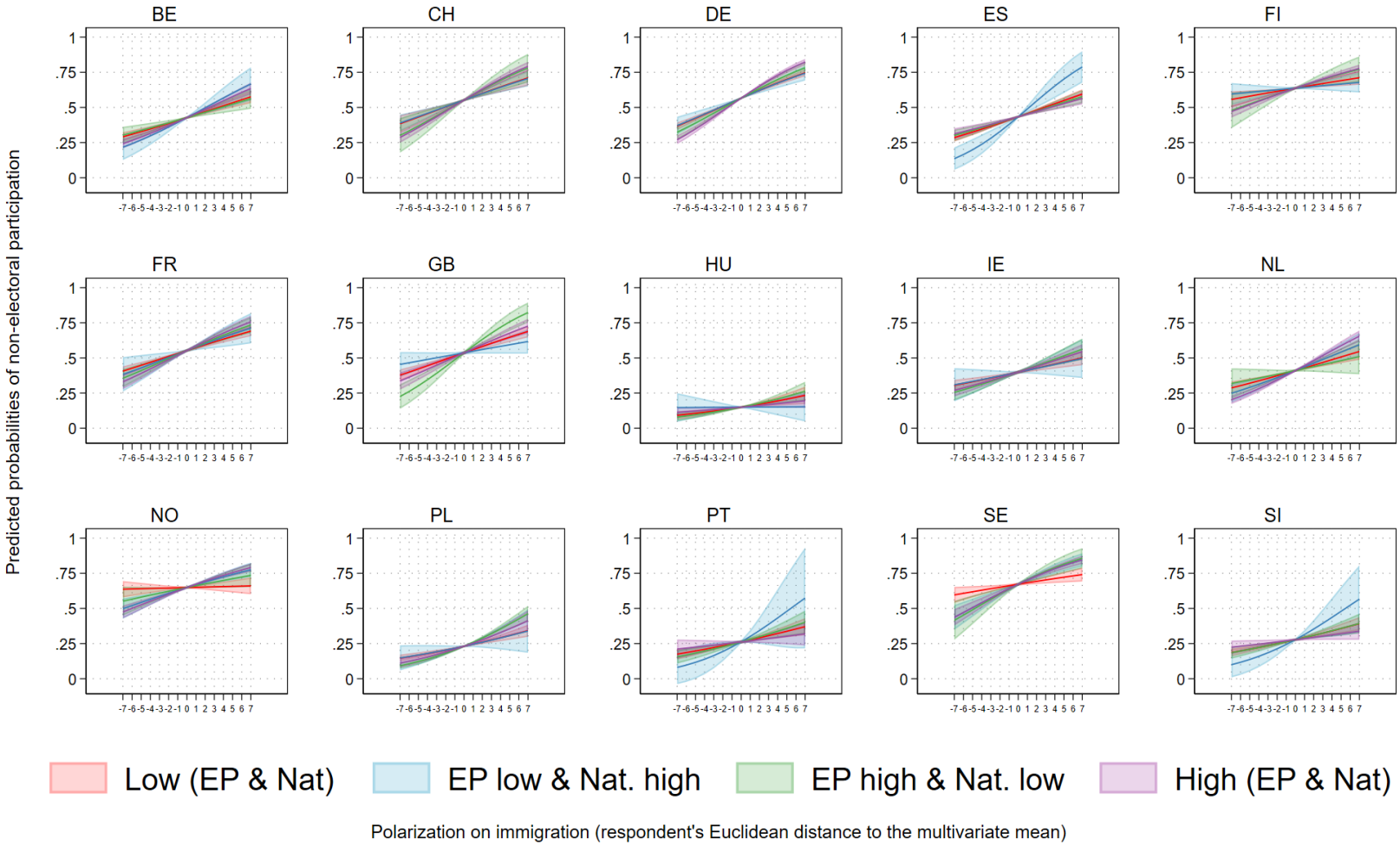
The plots also allow us to see how, across countries, the overall probabilities of engaging in non-electoral participation are quite different. Some countries exemplify these remarkable differences: in Norway and Sweden, the probabilities of participating tend to be high for all groups of trust, while in Hungary, the probabilities are much lower than all the other countries for the same groups. If we look at the slopes for all the categories of trust, we see how in Switzerland, Germany, France, the UK and the Netherlands, the relationship between polarisation on immigration and non-electoral participation tends to be stronger than in other countries. In some countries, the steep slopes are only found for certain categories. For instance, in Spain and Portugal, this occurs for low EP trust and high national trust, in the UK only for high EP individuals who do not trust national institutions, and in Sweden for high trusting individuals.

Figure 6. 6.Predicted probabilities of participating by polarisation on immigration (Mahalanobis distance) and levels of trust, by country



(Source: European Social Survey (R1-11). Note: weighted data.)

Figure 6. 7.Predicted probabilities of participating by polarisation on immigration (Euclidean distance) and levels of trust, by country



(Source: Own elaboration using the European Social Survey (R1-11). Note: higher positive values mean pro-immigration attitudes more distant to the multivariate mean and higher negative values mean anti-immigration attitudes more distant to the multivariate mean. Weighted data)

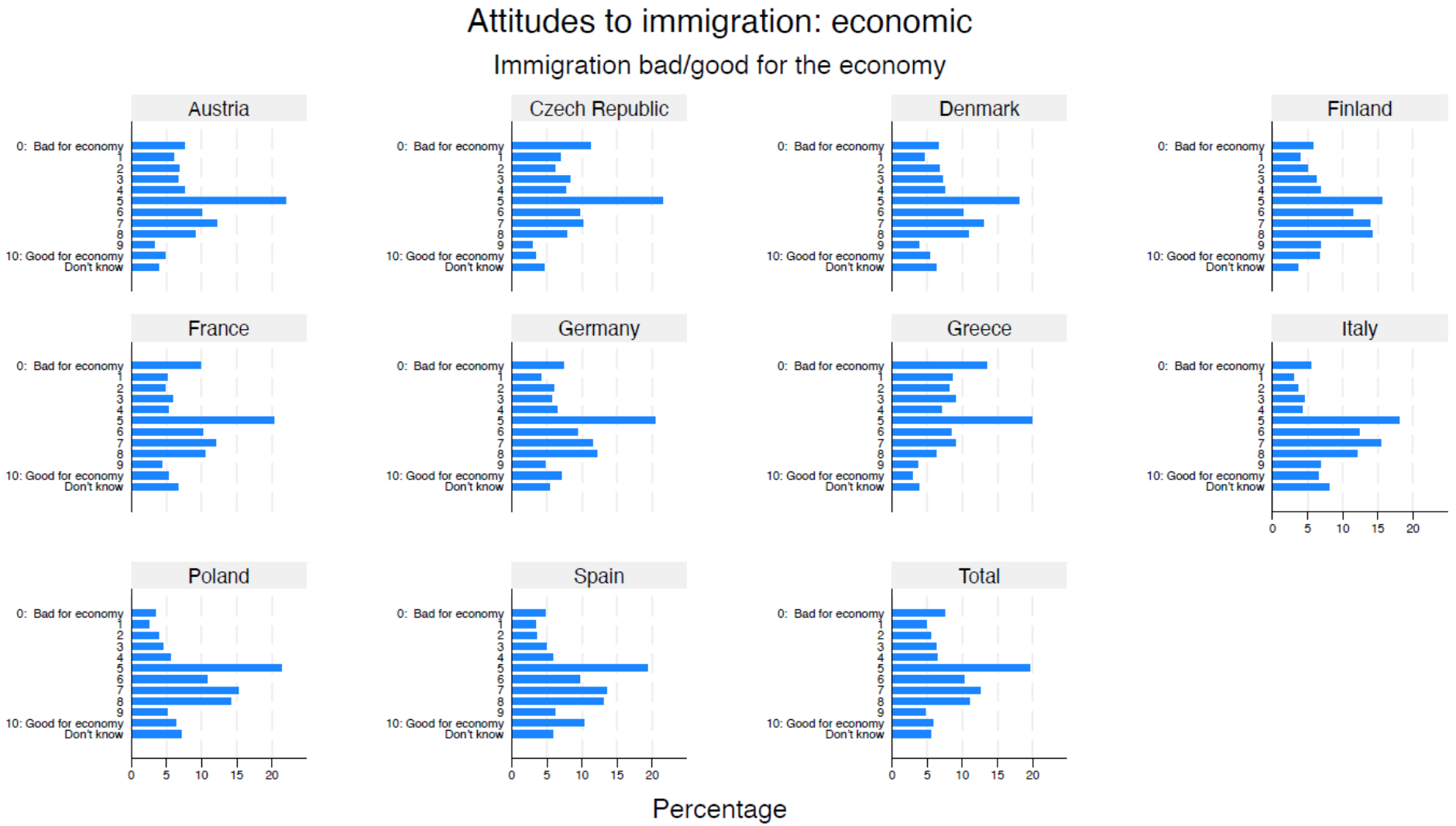
6.4 Zooming in: Examining the link between polarisation around immigration and diversity and political participation with a survey experiment

In this section, we zoom in on the examination of the causal mechanisms of association at the individual level between polarisation around immigration and diversity, political trust and political participation using the ActEU survey in 10 European countries: Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain. The sample size in each of these countries was of 1,300 respondents.

First, we describe the attitudes on immigration of all respondents based on their answers to the three questions measuring economic, cultural and ethnic/racial dimensions of such attitudes. Figure 6.8 shows the distribution of respondents by country and for the overall total of 13,000 respondents for the question on the economic threats/benefits of immigration. For the total, we see that a majority of respondents think that immigration is good for the economy. However, the distribution of responses changes considerably across the 10 countries, with Italy, Poland, Spain and Finland displaying the most positive views and Greece, Czechia, France and Austria more mitigated or negative views.

Turning to the cultural dimension of attitudes toward immigration, Figure 6.9 shows that distributions change for several countries. Views on the cultural impact of immigration tend to be more severe across most countries but are considerably more negative than on the economic consequences for Italy, Austria, Germany, Greece and Spain.

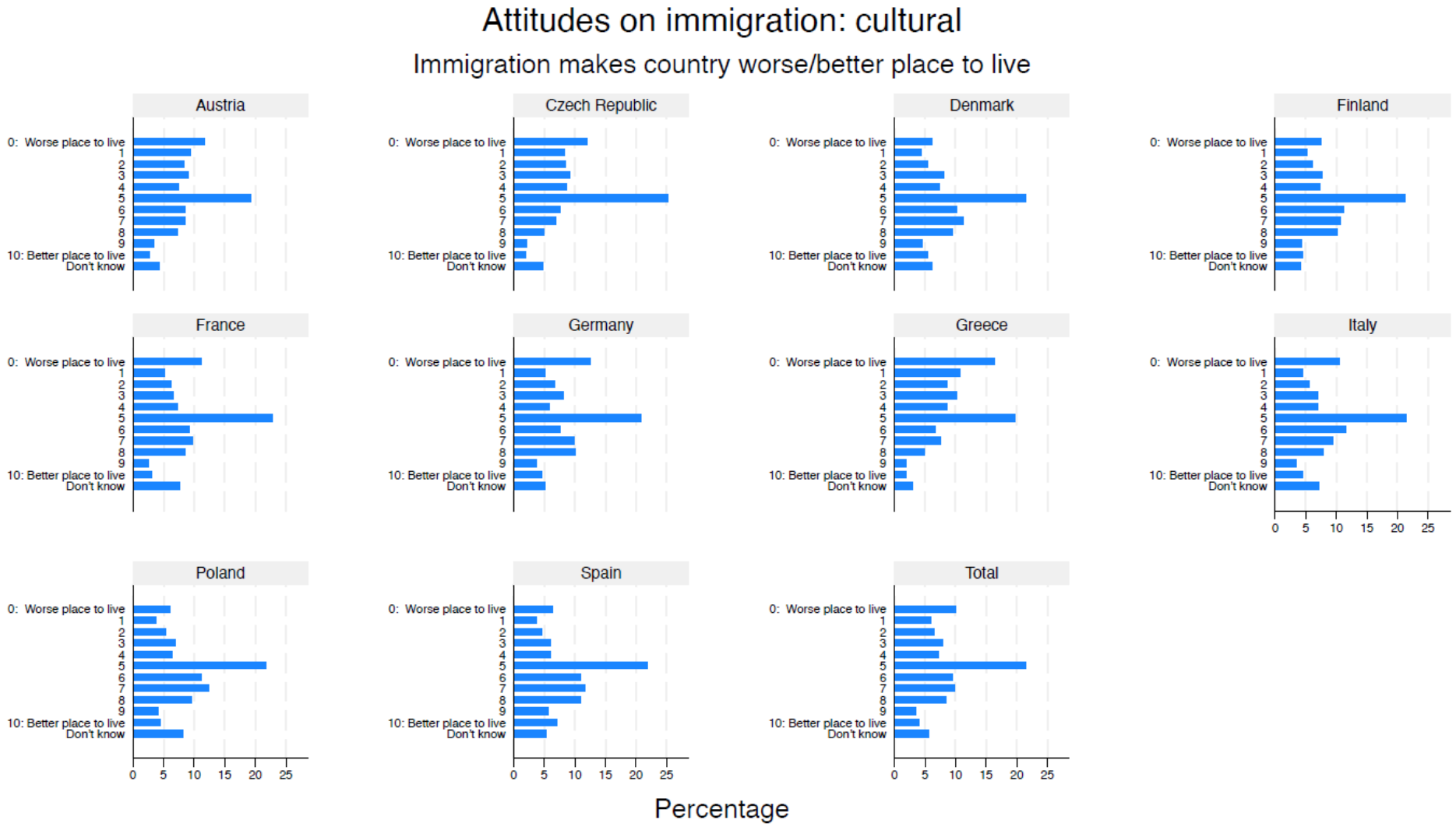
Figure 6. 8.Views on the economic threats/benefits of immigration



Note: Distribution for the 10 countries. N=13,000. Weighted data.

Source: ActEU survey.

Figure 6. 9.Views on the cultural threats/benefits of immigration

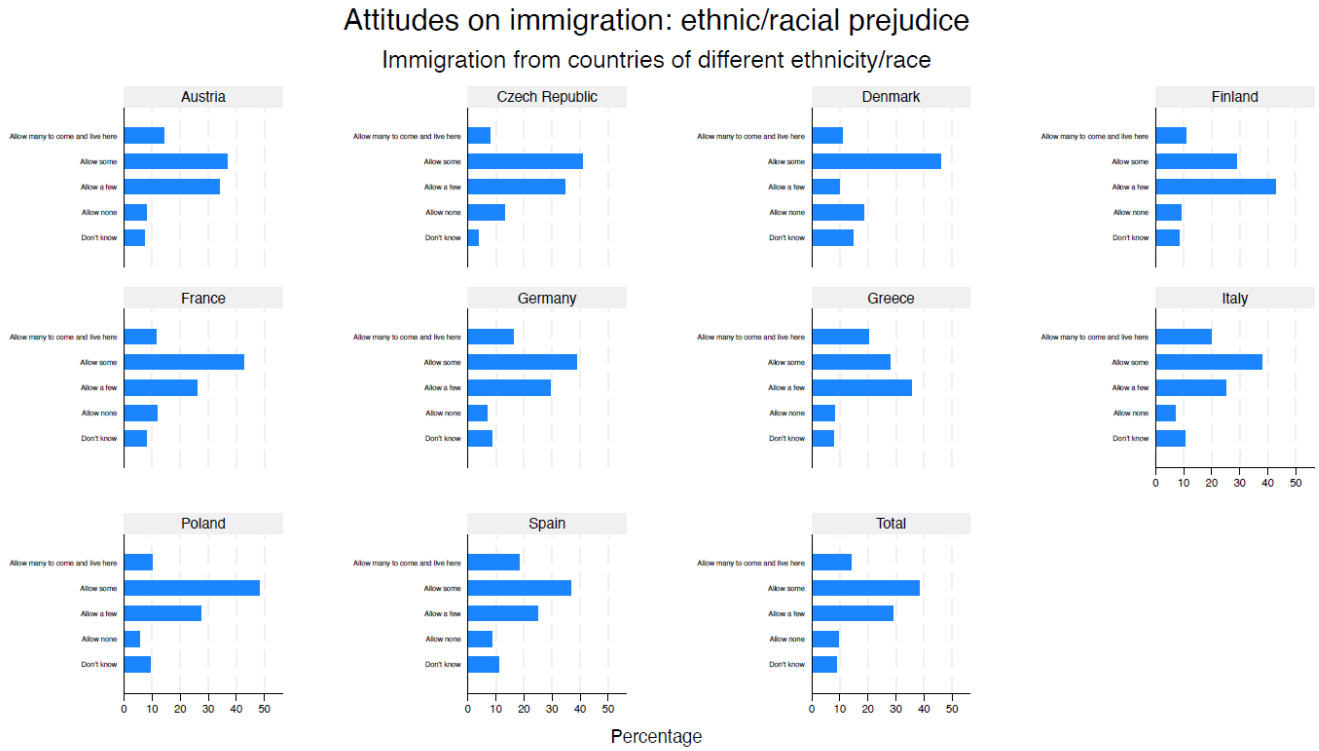


Note: Distribution for the 10 countries. N=13,000. Weighted data.

Source: ActEU survey.

Finally, Figure 6.10 shows the distribution by country of the item capturing ethnic/racial prejudice in attitudes towards immigration. The distribution of responses is relatively similar across countries but we can observe a greater polarisation of views for Denmark with 47% opting for the second most open category (allow some) and 18% opting for the most restrictive category (allow none). Greece, Italy and Spain show the largest percentages of respondents opting for the most open category (allow many) at between 18 and 20%, whereas Denmark, Czechia and France show above-average percentages of respondents wanting to allow no migrants from countries with different ethnic or racial groups to them.

Figure 6. 10.Views on the ethnic/racial composition of immigration



Note: Distribution for the 10 countries. N=13,000. Weighted data.
Source: ActEU survey.

With this background of the attitudes towards immigration in mind, we examine the results from a vignette experiment included in the ActEU survey. All respondents were shown a vignette where they were asked to think of a hypothetical situation where they would need to decide whether to join a political action organised by specific actors. Respondents saw the following text with the wording within square brackets independently and randomly assigned for each category of policy field, who mobilises and what type of political action they are organising:

> Political decision-makers often need to make controversial decisions where some groups in society disagree with their intentions. Imagine a situation where the parliament is considering a new measure concerning the policy on [*climate change / equality between men and women / the management of immigration*] that you **disagree** with.
>
> In reaction to that, [*a group of ordinary citizens / the opposition / a celebrity*] is organising [*an online petition / a campaign to email MPs / a peaceful demonstration / an occupation of the parliament building*] to show their **dissatisfaction** with the proposal.
>
> Please indicate how likely it is that you would join this action?

Answer scale (0-100 vertical slider scale): 0= extremely unlikely – 100= extremely likely

The results from this experiment (Table 6.2 and Figure 6.11) show that the most consequential factor is the degree of contention and cost of the political action, with the policy field and the type of mobilising actor having no significant impact on the likelihood of joining the action. Indeed, despite the politicisation and polarisation around immigration uncovered by both the ESS data and the ActEU survey, immigration being the policy field of the measure discussed in parliament does not alter the likelihood of joining an action to protest against a decision the respondent disagrees with. Who mobilises into action does not alter the likelihood of joining the action: it is indifferent whether it is a group of ordinary citizens, the opposition or a celebrity. By contrast, the degree of contention and how costly the action is has an incremental deterring effect on the likelihood of participation: proposing that citizens email their MPs reduces the likelihood that they will join by more than 3 percentage points compared to proposing that they sign an online petition, proposing that they join a demonstration reduces the likelihood of participating by nearly 7 percentage points and proposing that they join an occupation of parliament decreases the likelihood of joining by nearly 13 percentage points. We should bear in mind that the baseline probability is already lower than a 50% chance of joining.

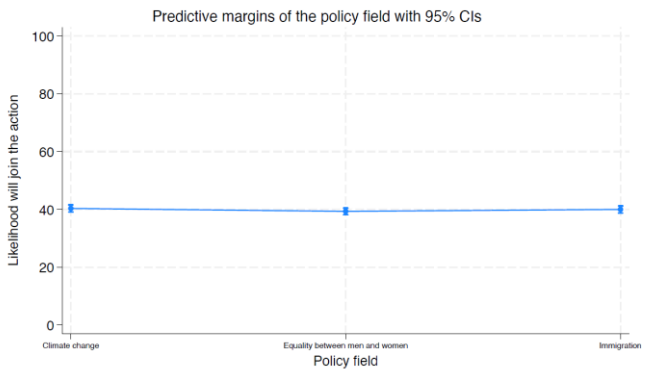
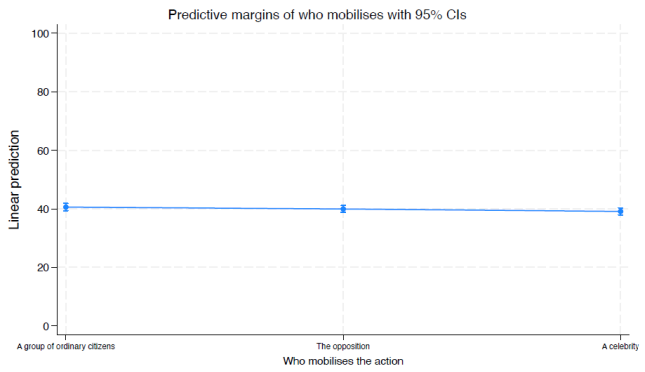
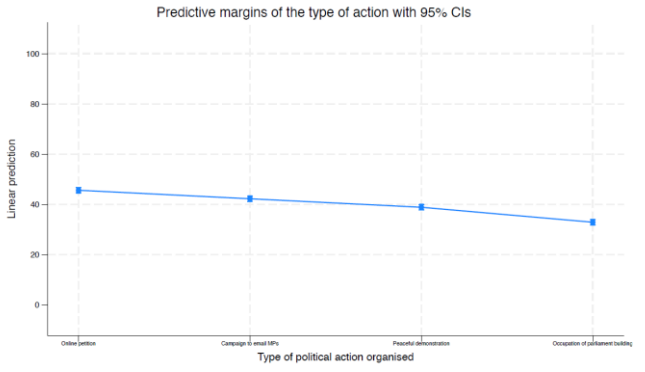
Moreover, the results (Model 3 in Table 6.2 and Figure 6.12) suggest that the interaction between the policy field and the contentious nature of the political action is only of some (modest) greater relevance for political mobilisation around climate change, as respondents seem somewhat more inclined to join less costly and non-contentious forms of political action (signing petitions and contacting MPs) when the action concerns climate change. Additionally, proposing more contentious forms of action is not consequential when the policy field is immigration. Hence, decision-making on immigration is not necessarily triggering a greater likelihood of joining contentious forms of political action.

Table 6. 2. Modelling the likelihood of joining an action to express dissatisfaction with a new policy measure considered by parliament

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Policy = immigration	0.25 (0.81)	-0.03 (0.8)	-0.63 (1.24)
Action form (ref. = signing an online petition)			
Emailing MPs	-3.43 (0.75)*		
Demonstration	-6.83 (1.23)*		
Occupation	-12.77 (1.58)*		
Contentious protest vs rest		-7.99 (1.33)*	-8.35 (1.46)*
Interaction immigration policy & protest action			1.09 (1.41)
Who mobilises (ref. = ordinary citizens)			
The Opposition	-1.35 (0.85)	-1.47 (0.87)	-1.44 (0.88)
A celebrity	-1.91 (1.10)	-2.40 (1.17)	-2.37 (1.17)
Intercept	46.65 (0.66)*	45.18 (0.81)*	45.33 (0.80)*
N. observations	13,000	13,000	13,000
R^2	0.03	0.02	0.02

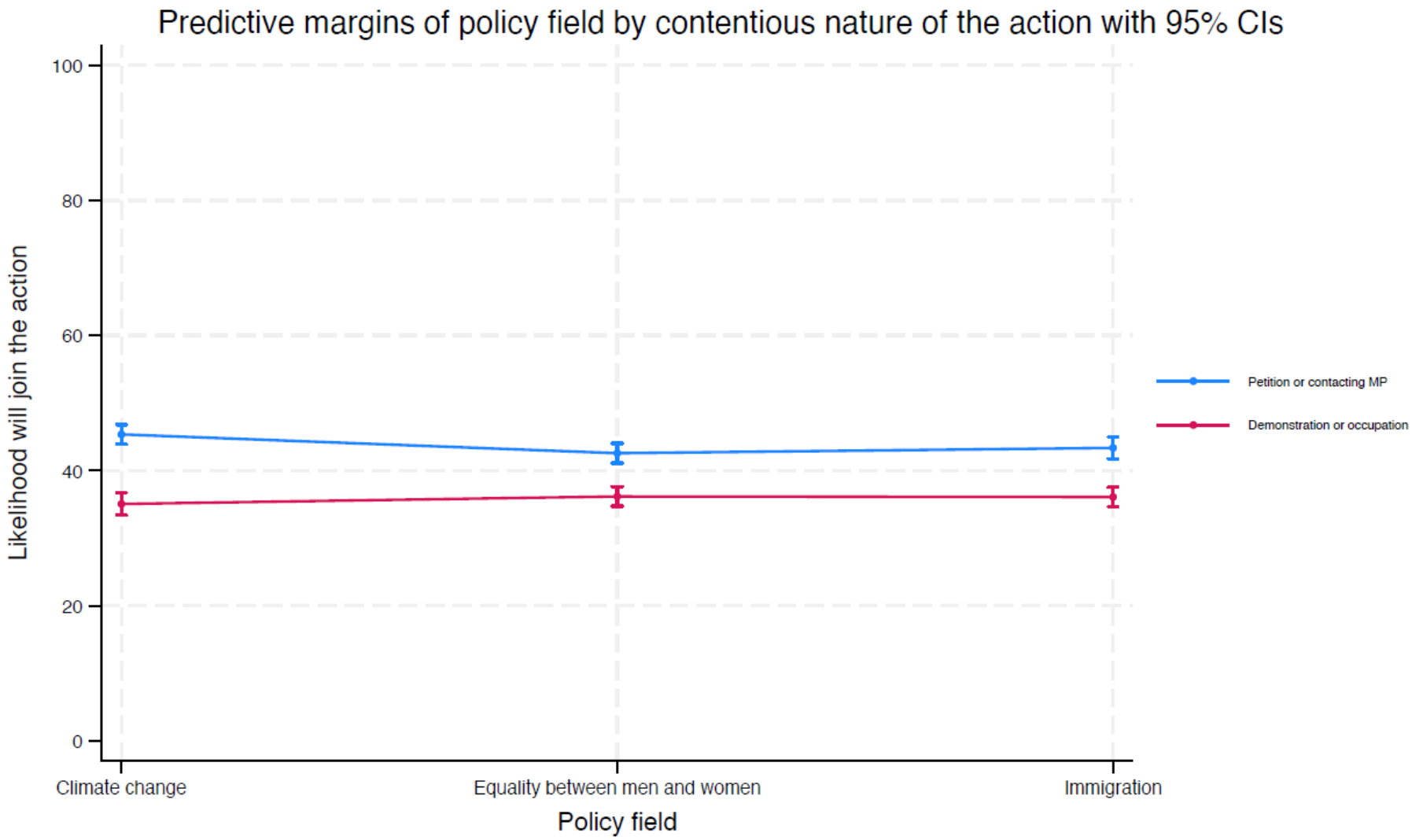
(Source: ActEU survey. Note: * Significant for p≤0.05; cluster robust standard errors (cluster = country). Data unweighted and no controls added.)

Figure 6. 11. Predictive margins for each level of the three attributes in the vignette experiment

Policy field	Who mobilises	Type of action
		

(Source: ActEU survey)

Figure 6. 12.Differences in the likelihood of joining the action by policy field as a function of the contentiousness of the type of action



(Source: ActEU survey)

Beyond the main effects of the policy field, the form of political action and who mobilises into action, we examine how political trust interacts with the policy field and the degree of contention of political action forms to shape citizens' inclination to protest against a decision they disagree with. We assess the following pre-registered hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1-a: At the individual level, a low level of political trust increases the likelihood of joining less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation (including participation in demonstrations and the occupation of parliament, measured in the vignette experiment).*

In contrast to the findings in Table 6.2 – which found no effect of the policy field on the likelihood of joining political action – Model 1 in Table 6.3 suggests that, once we control for their levels of political trust, citizens are less likely to join political action to protest against a parliamentary decision when that decision focuses on immigration policy. It also suggests that citizens with higher levels of trust are more likely to join any action proposed. When we tease out if highly trusting respondents are more/less likely to join an action if a more contentious form is proposed (Model 2) we find no evidence of an interaction effect, contrary to our expectation in hypothesis 1-a.

Additionally, we assess whether political trust levels may affect the likelihood of joining a political action if the policy issue at stake is on immigration and, again, the answer is that it does not (Model 3). Finally, we assess whether the interaction of political trust, contention of the form of action and the focus on immigration is relevant (Model 4) and, once again, it is not.

The overall conclusion of these findings is that – while immigration polarises the political debate and the public – it does not seem to have a triggering effect on greater mobilisation or on more contentious mobilisation. If anything, once we control for the fact that respondents with higher levels of political trust tend to be more likely to join all forms of political protest action, it seems that decision-making on immigration motivates less political action (when compared to climate change and gender equality policies) and not more.

Table 6. 3. Modelling the effect of political trust on the likelihood of joining an action to express dissatisfaction with a new policy measure considered by parliament

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Policy = immigration	-1.38 (0.33)*	-1.40 (0.34)*	-0.43 (1.25)	-1.85 (0.76)*
Contentious protest vs rest	-8.25 (1.28)*	-10.0 (1.87)*	-8.25 (1.28)*	-8.53 (1.46)*
Index of political trust (0-10)	2.44 (0.37)*	2.24 (0.33)*	2.51 (0.33)*	2.39 (0.34)*
Interaction: contentious & political trust		0.40 (0.24)		
Interaction: immigration policy & political trust			-0.22 (0.32)	
Interaction: immigration policy & contentious & political trust				0.19 (0.24)
Intercept	34.4 (1.80)*	35.27 (1.73)*	34.06 (1.63)*	34.70 (1.66)*
N. observations	12,542	12,542	12,542	12,542
R^2	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05

(Source: ActEU survey. Note: * Significant for p≤0.05; cluster robust standard errors (cluster = country). Data unweighted and no controls added.)

6.5 Zooming out: Examining the link between polarisation around immigration and diversity and political participation with social media data

In this last section, instead of zooming in to individual behaviour we zoom out to the nature of the political debate on social media and public reactions. Using the web-scraped data collected from X/Twitter within the ActEU project (see details in Gayo-Avello et al. 2024), we examine whether a higher salience of immigration from key stakeholders results in citizens reacting with calls to participation.

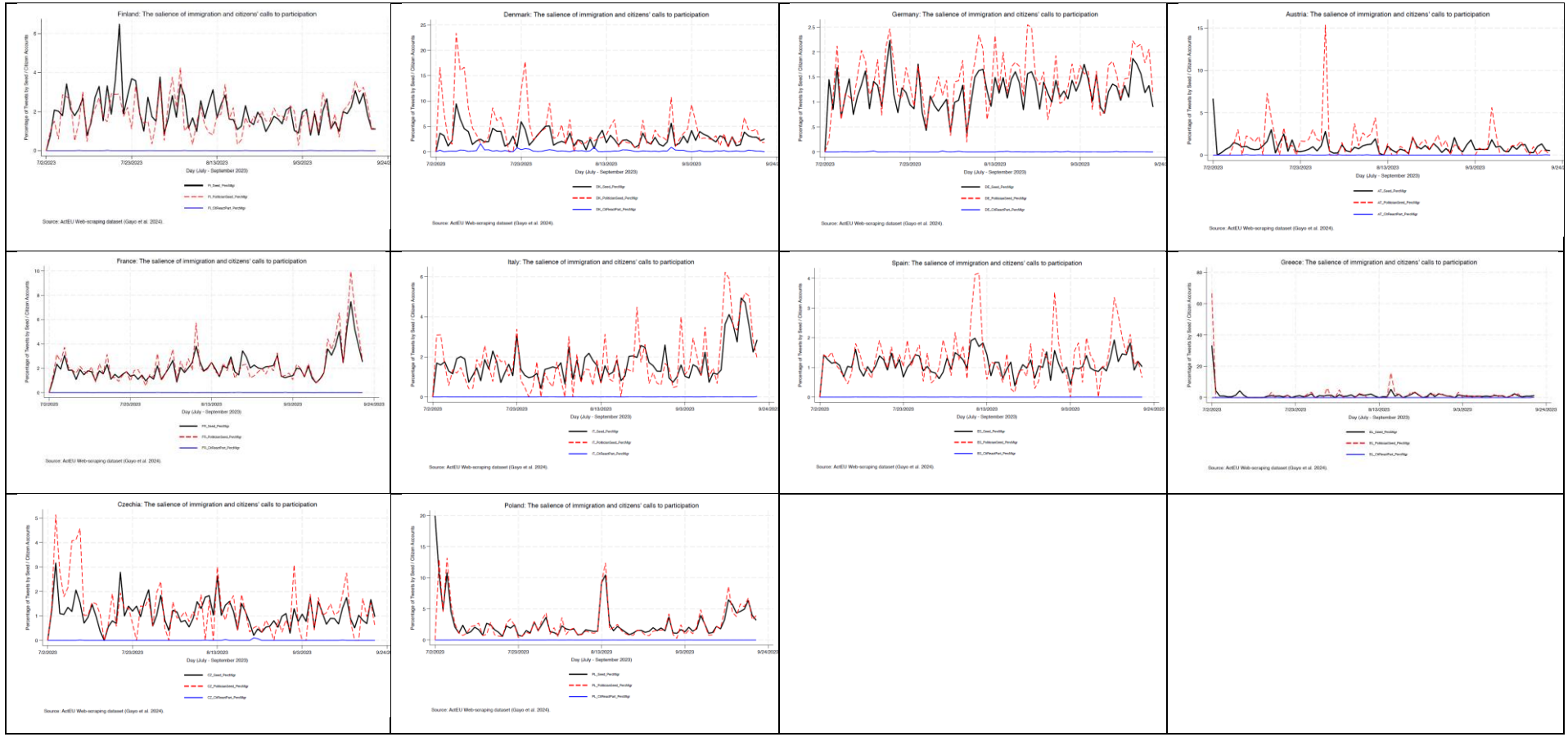
Figure 6.13 shows the time series of the behaviour of three sets of users: the overall set of key stakeholders monitored by the ActEU project (politicians, official government accounts, political parties, news media, interest organisations, trade unions and activist groups), the sub-set of politicians and the ordinary citizens that react to the former stakeholders. For each of the 10 countries, the three lines represent the percentage of their tweets that focus on immigration (for all key stakeholders and for politicians) and the percentage of citizens' reactions to tweets about immigration that include a call for action.

The findings are quite consistent with the previous ones obtained through the ActEU survey experiment. Although immigration is highly politicised, we do not find evidence that this politicisation triggers substantial calls for participation from citizens, at least not through their X/Twitter posts. With the only exception of Denmark, in all other countries we detected very few or no calls for action from citizens as a reaction to posts by key stakeholders focusing on immigration.

Moreover, in many countries (though not all of them) politicians are paying more attention to immigration than the overall set of public stakeholders and actors. This is clearly the case in Denmark, Austria, Italy and Spain; whereas in Finland, France and Poland politicians are paying a similar attention to other public actors and stakeholders. The levels of attention and salience of immigration are, however, very variable: they surpass 20% of all tweets on a given day by the politicians' accounts monitored in Denmark and 15% in Austria and Greece, but they are typically oscillating around 5-10% in most countries.

Overall, however, even in the moments of greatest attention to immigration on this social media platform we do not find evidence of corresponding peaks of calls for political participation, political action or protest from citizens.

Figure 6. 13. The correlation between the salience afforded by key public arena stakeholders and politicians to immigration and citizens' calls for participation on Twitter



(Source: ActEU web-scraping dataset (Gayo-Avello et al. 2024))

6.6 Discussions and conclusions

The analyses in this chapter have contributed to examining the link (or absence thereof) between political trust, political participation and the attitudes and discourses around immigration. Following a detailed discussion that points to the limitations of our knowledge regarding the polarisation dynamics around immigration and political participation at the individual level, we provide in our empirical sections several findings that give us more insights into the specific dynamics in these relationships.

Using rich and diverse sources of data, including all the existing waves of the European Social Survey, an original experimental survey, and the analysis of web-scraped social media data, we first find that the cross-country and over time variation of the individual-level attitudes regarding the economic, cultural, and racial/ethnic diversity consequences of immigration are, indeed, remarkably complex and varied across Europe. Even if we identify certain patterns — particularly more pro-immigration attitudes over time for the economic indicator — we tend to find considerable variability across countries in Europe. This is even clearer for polarisation around immigration, which has not followed a single trend pattern in the last 20 years: in some countries polarisation increases; in others, it decreases and yet, in others, it remains relatively stable. Nevertheless, the findings show that holding pro-immigration attitudes generally increases the probability of participating, irrespective of the levels of trust, although this is not true in all countries.

The analysis of experimental data helps us to causally examine the association between polarisation around immigration and political trust and participation in 10 European countries. The results of the survey experiment embedded in the ActEU public opinion survey show that, even if immigration tends to polarise the political debate and public, it does not appear to trigger greater or more contentious mobilisation. Instead, when controlling for the levels of trust, mobilisation around immigration issues seems to be lower than for other issues like climate change or gender equality. Finally, the analyses of the social media data obtained by the ActEU consortium through web-scraping are aligned with the findings from the experimental survey data. The findings show, again, how immigration is indeed highly politicised, although we cannot find evidence from the X/Twitter social media data suggesting that this high degree of politicisation influences the calls for participation from citizens.

All in all, this chapter argues that the complex relationship between political trust, political participation and attitudes towards immigration needs to be assessed carefully. We will only be able to fully understand these increasingly relevant aspects of the political dynamics of contemporary democracies in a more nuanced way if we further analyse them conjointly and use good-quality data at the individual level.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

Felix-Christopher von Nostitz (ICL), Giulia Sandri (ULB, previously ICL)

This report has examined the relationships between political trust and political participation. More specifically it focuses on when citizens are more likely to choose less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation especially protest action. It examined the overall relationship between political trust and political participation and zoomed in on it for the two central and often polarised policy areas of climate change and immigration. The report is based on five different data sources: qualitative focus group data, European Social Survey (ESS) data, ActEU survey data including a vignette experiment and finally the ActEU web scraped data. Following the introduction, we first presented a literature review of the existing scholarship connected to political trust and political participation. The chapter also introduces and explains our concept of participatory trust underlying our central research question and hypotheses we test in the succeeding chapters. Chapter three outlines the data and method used in the subsequent chapters. The next chapter presents the finding based on the ActEU Focus group data. This was followed by two empirical chapters focusing on the link between political trust and political participation by policy areas climate change and immigration. Overall, we do find a link between trust, political participation and choice and acceptance of contentious forms of political participation. Both trust and mistrust in politics can lead to political participation, with high political trust being linked to higher participation in unconventional political activities across both policy fields. In terms of attitudes towards a policy we find that those who took part in strikes are more likely to have climate change sceptic positions while having pro-immigration attitudes increases the probability of non-electoral participation.

The literature review presented the theoretical and empirical arguments connecting political trust and political participation. It first defines what we mean by both trust and political participation. It then focuses on how different levels of trust lead to different types of participation. Overall, it shows that the overall research on trust, mistrust and distrust has no consensus on the question whether a certain degree of political distrust is healthy or unhealthy for representative democracy.

Building on the discussion of the literature we introduce and explain our concept of participatory trust, the report's central research question and the hypotheses tested in the succeeding chapters. Overall, we test the following six specific hypotheses. We first analyse based on the ActEU Focus Group data if at the individual level the more decision-making in formal representative institutions is perceived as untransparent by citizens (hypothesis 1-b) and low level of knowledge about procedures of political participation options in political institutions (hypothesis 1-c), the greater the likelihood of opting for forms of participation that are outside formal institutional channels of representative democracy. Then we test the hypotheses of how political trust affects choice and acceptance of unconventional participation in the two policy fields of climate change (2-a and 2-b) and immigration (2-b and 3-b). Chapter four outlines the data and method used in the policy chapters consisting of qualitative focus group data, European Social Survey (ESS) data, ActEU survey data including a vignette experiment and finally the ActEU web scraped data emanating from the social media Twitter/X.

The first empirical chapter based on the ActEU focus group data we observe that citizens' perceptions of how to engage in the democratic process and access knowledge about decision-making processes and participation options affect their "confidence in regime institutions and approval of incumbent office-holders" (Norris 2017, p. 24). For Germany and Czechia trust in

participation seems to rely primarily on how efficient citizens perceive it to be. In both cases, trust in the efficacy of various forms of political participation is limited. In contrast, the French focus groups frame participation not in terms of efficacy but as a means to express disapproval of the political system, emphasizing voting, unconventional collective action, and conventional demonstrations as tools to voice their dissatisfaction. Overall, we see that the topic of contentious forms of participation in the field of climate change (which has been prompted through a visual) triggered high discussions in the groups in Germany and Greece and less in Czechia and France. In contrast, while we see many discussions on the topic of immigration as a challenge, we barely observe narrations on political participation or contentious action in the field of immigration. The guiding research assumptions, that process-knowledge about participation options (hypothesis 1-c) and transparency about how participation efforts actually feed into the policymaking process (hypothesis 1-b) matter for the decision (how) to participate and whether to trust political institutions and actors can be supported.

In the second empirical chapter on political participation and trust in (anti-)climate change actions, we find based on the ESS analysis that feeling concerned and responsible for climate change increases trustful attitudes towards politics, while indifference and not feeling responsible increases distrust. Polarised opinions on climate change do not alter these trends. Regarding participation, feeling concerned and responsible for climate change and having higher levels of political distrust increase the probability of taking part in more contentious action. The same holds true for those who are not concerned about climate change, and, to a lesser extent, not feeling personally responsible. This supports our hypothesis that high levels of polarisation reinforcing a link between levels of political trust and contentious action – pointing to a specific role for distrust.

The analysis of the ActEU survey provides some information about political trust: trust in MPs correlates with participation in unconventional political activities, while political distrust does not significantly affect the likelihood of joining unauthorised protests. Political polarisation strengthens the link between political trust and participation in public demonstrations, with recent demonstrators showing increased trust in the government. This relationship applies to both pro-climate and climate-sceptic positions. Those who participated in strikes tend to have positive views of climate denialists and negative views of those who accept anthropogenic climate change. Our hypothesis about the heightened effect of political trust in contentious participation forms under conditions of polarisation also finds some confirmation from the ActEU survey, which points to a role for political trust. In vignette experiments, furthermore, political distrust emerges once more as influential in the relationship between polarisation, political trust, and the perceived acceptability of protest, with distrustful individuals declaring themselves more likely to join peaceful demonstrations or occupy parliament buildings in support of our hypothesis 3-a. Our tentative analysis of web-scraped data suggests that X contains much more climate sceptic content, and that most of that climate sceptic content is linked with political distrust. Furthermore, pro-climate and trustful users are politically active in a range of different ways, while distrust and climate scepticism are linked only to action through political parties. Though this seems to challenge some of our other findings based on survey data, the literature points to strong links between populist right-wing parties and climate scepticism in Europe. Therefore, concerning hypothesis 2-a, while no clear relationship emerged between political trust and participating in demonstrations, in some respects polarised opinions on climate change do appear to strengthen the relationship between political trust and demonstration participation in support of the hypothesis. There is stronger proof for this hypothesis regarding polarisation for political trust and taking part in strikes, while the role of political distrust and protest appear even more strongly linked under

polarisation. Political distrust and the perceived legitimacy of contentious action also appears stronger under polarisation, while political trust seems to play a specific role in perceptions of contentious action at the local level. This provides some support for hypothesis 3-a. Overall, our findings point to a stronger role for political distrust for both hypotheses, but trust also plays a role in polarisation on climate change and participation choices.
The final empirical chapter on political participation and trust in (anti-)immigration actions again first based on the ESS analysis that polarisation on immigration varies by country and over time but does not correlate with pro- or anti-immigration attitudes. High trust in national institutions leads to more non-electoral participation, especially when combined with low trust in the European Parliament. Pro-immigration attitudes increase non-electoral participation, while anti-immigration attitudes decrease it, regardless of trust levels. This unsignificant effect of political trust challenges the assumption raised by hypothesis 2-b, which expected than higher polarisation on immigration issues strengthens the relationship between the individual level of political trust and the probability to use less conventional and more contentious forms of political participation. The ActEU survey reveals most respondents view immigration as economically beneficial, though cultural impacts are viewed more negatively. Ethnic/racial prejudice shows similar distribution across countries, with some showing greater polarisation. The ActEU experiment indicates that the degree of contention and cost of political action are the most influential factors in participation, not the policy field or mobilising actors. Indeed, even if immigration tends to be a polarising topic in Europe, this trend does not seem to feed deeper or more unconventional types of political activity. These results also contest the idea that polarisation on immigration would constitute a triggering factor for the recourse to more contentious forms of political mobilisation. Besides, if we assess the impact of the level of trust, analyses relying on the ActEU experimental survey show that mobilisations around immigration issues would tend to be lower than for other political issues – such as climate change and gender equality. In addition, the empirical work conducted through the analysis of the web-scraped data emanating from X does not highlight any influence of high degrees of politicization about immigration on the calls for participation from European citizens. Both results question the assumption expressed by hypothesis 3-b, which theorised that high levels of polarisation on immigration reinforce the interaction between degrees of political trust and deeper levels of acceptability towards protest actions.

In conclusion, our in-depth analysis of patterns and trends of the relationships between political trust and political participation shows that participants focus more on the efficacy of participation than the types of participation (voting, demonstrations, party membership). They turn to unconventional modes like protests when conventional methods seem less effective. Both low and high levels of trust can increase participation, especially in unconventional activities. Across climate change and immigration, high political trust correlates with more non-electoral participation. Surprisingly, those who strike are more likely to be climate change sceptics, while pro-immigration attitudes increase non-electoral participation. Activists using unconventional methods are more diverse than often portrayed, with varied attitudes towards climate change and immigration policies. They trust politics, but not uniformly across all levels.

With these findings in mind, we can make several policy-relevant recommendations for both European and national institutions,

1. Invest in Trust-Building Measures: Political actors and institutions at all levels must commit to building trust as for example recommended by the OECD (2022) and Eurofound (2022). Trust in institutions across Member States has declined, affecting political participation.

Building trust can foster open and inclusive public debates, enabling institutions to meet increasing citizen expectations and reinforce democracy.
This can be achieved by enhancing mechanisms for citizen participation. Governments must invest in improving mechanisms that give all people a voice and are responsive to those voices. Providing equal opportunities for representation in decision-making is crucial for distinguishing democracy from other forms of government. In this regard the OECD report (2022) recommends focusing on both policy outcomes and processes, including protest and unconventional participation, to maintain democratic institutions and norms.
Moreover, we highly recommend (digital) innovations that ensure both traceability of citizens' actions and transparent feedback loops between decision-making processes and the individuals or groups active in the relevant policy field. For instance, policymakers should foster the adoption of interactive legislative dashboards and other e-participation platforms by parliamentary assemblies at all levels (European, national, regional, local) that track legislative proposals, debates, and voting records. These dashboards can show the progress of initiatives, highlight citizen-submitted suggestions, and indicate how feedback was incorporated into the final decision. Moreover, public authorities especially at local level could promote mobile applications that are designed to notify users about upcoming public consultations, town hall meetings, or policy changes. They could also provide interactive timelines showing the evolution of a policy based on citizen feedback. In terms of non-digital innovations, policymakers could increase the number of regularly scheduled, open public meetings (at local level, such as community town hall meetings) where citizens can directly hear from and question decision-makers about the outcomes of their participation.

2. Secure Rights of Protest and Address Demands Seriously: We support calls by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Council of Europe, and human rights organisations such as The Civil Liberties Union for Europe to ensure the right to protest is protected in the EU and its members states and to take participants' demands seriously to foster social dialogue. Many protesters still trust politics to solve issues and ignoring them or labelling them as mistrustful of politics may push them towards extreme actions, such as protest voting. In line with Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human rights we recommend recognizing the diverse profiles of protesters and avoid stigmatisation and homogeneous treatment to prevent potential radicalization. Engage with citizens' concerns to mitigate the risk of undermining trust in institutions and triggering political discontent. Potential measures to be adopted or strengthened in the near future could include for instance: creating dedicated offices within local or national governments to serve as points of contact for protest groups and to be responsible for organizing dialogue sessions, gathering protester input, and providing timely feedback on how their concerns are being addressed; establishing independent commissions to monitor law enforcement's response during protests and to investigate any abuses, ensuring that protesters' rights are protected; developing both digital and non-digital feedback systems (such as suggestion boxes at protest sites or online platforms) that allow protestors to share their experiences and recommendations after events, while their input can be integrated into policy reviews and reforms; issuing regular public reports detailing how protester concerns have influenced policy changes or adjustments.
3. Regularize Climate Change Surveys: Improve the study of climate change by ensuring regular inclusion of related questions in European surveys. For example, the ESS dataset included climate change questions in only three waves (8th, 10th, and 11th). Include these questions in all future waves to gather consistent data and inform policy decisions. This

would further improve our knowledge on citizens' trust in politics to address climate change and how this relates to choices of political participation.

4. Reframe public dialogue beyond polarisation: Our diverse data sources indicate that the levels of political polarisation—both in general and on issues such as climate change and immigration—are lower than originally anticipated. However, even these moderate levels of polarisation can have significant implications for public discourse. To enhance the quality and dynamics of political debate, we recommend that politicians and policymakers consciously avoid framing discussions in terms of polarisation. Publicly emphasizing polarisation can inadvertently reinforce a vicious cycle of fragmented, conflictual, and divisive debates. Framing issues in a polarising manner may amplify divisions, even when the actual levels of disagreement are moderate. Instead, a focus on shared values and common objectives can promote a more constructive dialogue. This approach not only helps reduce unnecessary conflict but also encourages collaboration across political and ideological lines. In practical terms, this could results in the creation for instance of "Common Ground" forums. In these forums, experts, community leaders, and policymakers could engage in dialogue that centers on shared challenges—such as the impact of climate change on local communities or the economic contributions of immigrants. By emphasizing common concerns and collaborative problem-solving, such forums would help shift the narrative away from divisiveness and toward collective action. This strategy has been successfully implemented in various municipalities where community-led dialogues have led to innovative, bipartisan solutions.

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About ActEU

How can we conceptualize and empirically measure political trust and legitimacy beyond the usual survey question "How much trust do you have in the parliament?"? Does the multi-level nature of European representative democracies require an identical level of citizen support at the regional, national and EU levels? How does social polarisation on key policy issues of our times – immigration, climate change, and gender inequality– challenge the political trust in, and legitimacy of, democratic political systems? And what can policymakers and civil society do to master these challenges? ActEU aims at finding answers to these questions pursuing two overarching goals: In phase 1, we map and investigate persistent problems of declining trust, legitimacy and representation in Europe with a particular attention to the polarisation of societies and the EU's multi-level structures. Providing an innovative conceptual framework on political attitudes, behaviour and representation across Europe, we establish an original empirical infrastructure based on an innovative combination of methods and newly collected quantitative and qualitative empirical data (focus groups, experimental surveys, web scraping). In phase 2, these results will flow directly into the creation of a toolbox of remedial actions to enhance political trust in and legitimacy of European representative democracies. In cooperation with a newly created Civil Society Network, Youth Democracy Labs across 13 European cities and in exchange with political cartoonists "Cartooning for democracy", we will develop context-sensitive solutions for all polity levels and some of the most polarising policy areas, and craft tailor-made toolkits for both policymakers and civil society and the educational sector. Finally, we deploy a differentiated dissemination strategy to maximize ActEU's scientific, policy and societal impact in activating European citizens' trust and working towards a new era of representative democracy.

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