



Reporting on Deliverable D3.4 – Report (including policy recommendations) explaining for which groups in society, decreasing trust acts as a critical mediator for the changing pattern of citizens' political participation in Europe

PROJECT	
Project number:	101094190
Project acronym:	ActEU
Project name:	Towards a new era of representative democracy - Activating European citizens' trust in times of crises and polarisation
Call:	HORIZON-CL2-2022-DEMOCRACY-01
Topic:	HORIZON-CL2-2022-DEMOCRACY-01-08
Type of action:	HORIZON-RIA
Responsible service:	REA
Project starting date:	01 / 03 / 2023
Project duration:	36 months

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DELIVERABLE	
Deliverable No	D13
Deliverable related No	D3.4
Work package No	WP3
Description	Report (including policy recommendations) explaining for which groups in society decreasing trust acts as a critical mediator for the changing patterns of citizens' political participation in Europe.
Lead beneficiary	UNITN
Type	R
Dissemination level	PU
Due to date	30 Apr 2025
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Reporting on Deliverable D3.4 – Report (including policy recommendations) explaining for which groups in society, decreasing trust acts as a critical mediator for the changing pattern of citizens' political participation in Europe

Executive Summary

In this report we shift the focus compared to earlier work in work package 3 to focus on the collective side of political participation and the role that trust and distrust play in shaping changing patterns. We take an innovative and exploratory approach, drawing on existing survey data, the ActEU focus groups, and the ActEU web-scraped data from X to investigate these questions from novel angles. The literature on political trust and participation suggests that to properly understand changing patterns, we must pay attention to understand political participation in a broad sense that comprises all collective behaviour engaged in with the intention of shaping political decisions and institutions. It also suggests that longstanding links between some types of political participation and some types of political actors, such as strikes and trades union, or political parties and voting, are changing. Finally, it also suggests that one clear area to explore to shed light on those changes is the field of emotions and how they interact with feelings of political trust and distrust.

To provide new evidence about these issues we construct a specific approach to focus on the supply side of collective actors seeking to mobilise citizens into political participation and, to a more limited extent, on the demand side. We do this through the **novel concept of participatory trust elaborated within the ActEU project: this links political trust and distrust to forms of participation via attention to both behaviour and perceptions (emotions).**

The empirical chapters in the report offer a wealth of insights into different aspects of this topic. The **analysis of existing survey data** updates our knowledge about the links between socio-demographic groups and political participation. On **voting**, the analysis suggests that older and higher social class individuals were more likely to have voted in previous national elections, while **younger and lower social class respondents showed a higher tendency not to vote. Low political trust exacerbated these patterns**, contributing to lower voter turnout among these groups. On legal demonstrations **respondents under 30 were less likely to participate in legal demonstrations, particularly those with low political trust**, contrary to common associations of youth with protesting. Participation in **unlawful demonstrations appears gendered towards those identifying as male** along with unemployment and high education levels. Low political trust exaggerated these trends, suggesting it drives more contentious political participation. However, **the changing definitions of lawful protest in Europe must be considered, as they can affect participation trends and political trust levels.**

We then take an exploratory approach to the web-scraped data from X to examine whether different political actors accounted for in the data collection match with certain forms of political participation, and what role political trust and distrust plays in that relationship. Our analysis is based on a limited set of data composed of the calls for political action we were able to identify in the broader web-scraped data from X. It is important to note that the calls were limited to more conventional or institutional forms of action to the exclusion of more contentious action. This itself suggests an important finding: **that more contentious actors**



either do not post calls for action on X or have moved away from this platform, and that further research on data from other platforms contained in the ActEU dataset may be more revealing about more contentious forms of participation.

Our analysis of the data we do have suggests that **links between political affiliations and participation that mirror existing knowledge**: political actors comprising politicians and parties are more likely to call for voting/electing and participation in meetings or events. Interest groups and unions are more likely to call for action in the form of contacting politicians and institutions. Media actors also appeared in our sample as slightly associated with calls for voting/electing, linked to the timing of the webscraping around the European elections. **When we consider political trust and distrust annotations for these tweets by political actors, these patterns persist**. However, our limited data from **those responding to these calls for action – the demand side of political participation – suggest that political distrust breaks this pattern**. This finding is also reflected in a first qualitative exploration of responses to calls for action. Though tentative, it **appears that political distrust is a source for changing patterns of participation away from their expected directions amongst those responding to more mainstream and less contentious political actors**.

We then take a deep dive into the under-studied area of **how emotions, motivations, and triggers link participatory trust and political participation choices**. We first consider findings emerging from the ActEU focus groups data, following their composition into groups of committed, average, and disconnected citizens as well as the specific women's focus groups. For the committed group, participation is heavily influenced by **efficacy evaluations** and the perception that actions will make a difference. Conventional participation forms like party membership are often seen as inefficient and not worth the time or effort. Unconventional and contentious participation forms are instead linked to feelings of efficacy and satisfaction. For the average group, efficacy remains a significant motivator for participation. Voting in particular is seen as an efficient form of participation, and linked to the idea of duty. Party membership is viewed as pointless, not enjoyable, and time consuming, which is understood as a significant barrier. Unconventional participation forms are seen as efficient ways to make citizens' voices heard and demonstrate solidarity. For the disconnected group, the picture changes significantly. Here, the primary trigger for both non-participation and participation is a sense of pointlessness and resignation, while efficacy, dissatisfaction, and disenchantment are also significant factors. Voting is seen as a civic duty, although often viewed as ineffective. Unconventional participation forms are perceived as ineffective, and associated with feelings of resignation and disenchantment. For the focus groups formed on the basis of political engagement we thus see patterns around the **importance of efficacy evaluations and the special status of voting which is linked to duty**. Protests and demonstrations emerge as preferred by more politically engaged citizens.

These patterns also emerge when considering the **women's groups**, which also highlight efficacy concerns in relation to participation choices. The sense of duty connected to voting takes a different form to some extent in that it is often linked by women to a sense of obligation despite perceived inefficacy: **women struggled for the right to vote, and exercising it is important even if of limited impact**. In addition, women's groups revealed that **dissatisfaction with current political systems** serves as an initial motivator for participation. The interplay of emotional, pragmatic, and normative triggers shapes women's political participation, with specific expressions varying depending on the mode of engagement.



We then develop an innovative approach to link the findings on emotions from the focus groups based on levels of political engagement to the ActEU webscraped data from X, using an innovative analytical strategy described in detail in the chapter. Our analysis highlights the importance of incorporating the consideration of perceptions, emotions, and triggers to understand citizen participation behaviour and the role of participatory trust. The analysis uncovers differences in the patterns suggested by the focus group data when transferred to the broader space of a social media channel. **X emerges as a space where disconnected citizens are particularly vocal when discussing participatory trust**, with the demand side (citizens reacting to political actors) being more prominent than the supply side (different political actors).

Efficacy considerations, which emerged as transversally important in the focus group data, appear strongly only for the **average group on X**, while discussions of the sense of duty also appear much less important. The main emotions expressed on X by the average group are **'efficacy' and 'pointlessness.'** Both are linked to calls to vote. Generally, emotions are rarely connected to calls for political engagement, except for the case of Germany. In the **committed group**, the main motivations and emotions expressed now emerge as **'political interest' and 'awareness'**, which appears more in line with existing literature and indicates a focus on the **process of participation**. Here too, **emotions and motivations are rarely linked to calls for action**, except for 'awareness' which is linked to attending meetings or voting. National differences are evident here though, with few results linking emotions and calls for action apart from in Germany – this points to a need for further manual coding and checking of the webscraped data. In the **disconnected group** the most identified emotion is 'dissatisfaction,' followed by 'distance,' 'disinterest,' and 'dishonesty.' This suggests that the disconnected group is more **resigned and passive**, linking conventional participation forms with a lack of efficacy. Calls to attend meetings or events are met with 'dissatisfaction' and 'disinterest', while high levels for 'dishonesty' and low scores for 'efficacy' suggest a preference for alternative political actions. **Dissatisfaction is the most expressed emotion across all countries, except in Greece.** Again, it is worth noting that the **disconnected group is the largest** and most passive.

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Overall, the analysis of tweets shows that the average group focuses on efficacy and pointlessness; the committed group is driven by political interest and awareness, with less emphasis on efficacy. The disconnected group is the largest by far, expresses high levels of dissatisfaction and is more passive and resigned. When citizens express themselves independently on X, we thus see more variation than we do in focus groups, where citizens are asked to actively reflect and react to one another's ideas face to face.

Recommendations

In light of evidence from existing survey data, political distrust appears to galvanise participation in unlawful demonstrations. This should also be considered in light of recent changes in many European countries to the definitions of lawful demonstrations, often directed at discouraging disruptive but peaceful actions in support of climate and social justice. As underlined in other ActEU deliverable reports, national authorities should consider more tolerant approaches to peaceful protest as part of broader approaches to address political trust given the interlinkages revealed and current knowledge about the effects on political participation patterns that flow from attempts to restrict protest rights.



More broadly, there is some evidence that political distrust plays a role in breaking links with conventional participation choices emerging from both existing survey data and the ActEU webscraped data from X. In addition, the analysis of the existing survey data suggests that more conventional participation is less common for younger, and working class, Europeans. This suggests that authorities at all levels should develop and further implement programmes addressing political distrust, as these may be well placed to address falling voter turnout, political party membership, and trade union membership in the EU, and more specifically to address political apathy among younger generations. The ActEU toolkit will be a useful resource in this view.

Considering the analysis of emotions points to various recommendations too. First, political engagement on X appears to be the preserve of more disconnected citizens who feel dissatisfied about political participation possibilities. Engaging on this platform may allow policymakers to target less trustful citizens. Content that seeks to explain how political participation can be effective and can shape politics may be particularly useful given the findings in the analysis.



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1 Introduction to the report

Max-Valentin Robert, Louisa Parks, Felix von Nostitz & Kristina Weissenbach

The linkages between levels of political trust and how citizens decide to engage in political participation are complex and relational. Political trust may be linked to class affiliations, economic status, education, gender identities, and ideology. It may then be further shaped by public discourses in the media, as well as by social networks. It might vary for local, national, and international levels, as well as across institutions and actors. In addition, levels of political trust may in turn be shaped by acts of political participation: a vote cast but perceived as ineffective may inform decisions to participate in other ways; the networks formed in taking part in a demonstration often lead to further participation in extra-institutional avenues. In this report we shed light on how political trust levels act as an intervening variable – that is as one informing factor – in political participation choices. We pay attention to the relationships between different types of political participation – ranging from what have been described as ‘conventional’ forms such as voting to more ‘unconventional’ or contentious forms such as protest or boycotts – and political trust levels in a range of different groups in society. We consider both more classical groups based on socio-demographic considerations and different affiliations to groups like political parties, activist groups or trades union. We also draw on a range of data to go beyond the existing state of the art on political trust and participation choices. Thus, we analyse not only existing survey data but also the original webscraped dataset produced in the ActEU project. Moving beyond existing survey data allows us, as explained in the remainder of this introduction, to account for different conceptualisations of political trust, mistrust, and distrust in institutions and actors. In addition, paying close attention to the ways in which political trust is linked to political participation decisions also leads us to focus on the role of emotions as a catalyst for translating trust into action (or not). To explore this we draw on both the ActEU focus group data and on the ActEU webscraped data.

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In the remainder of this introductory chapter we situate the efforts of the report in the existing literature by providing a general overview on political trust, mistrust, and distrust as well as political participation. Building on that review we then provide a brief discussion of our conceptualisation of political trust and participation as well as the role of participatory trust which speaks to the analyses on emotions and perceptions. The introductory chapter is followed by 3 empirical chapters. Chapter 2 explores existing survey data to update our knowledge about the links between socio-demographic groups and political participation choices. Chapter 3 draws instead on the webscraped data from X, developing a tailored approach to explore how different political and activist affiliations tally with different political participation choices. Chapter 4 explores the complex intervening role between trust, perceptions and emotions, and how these trigger different forms of political participation, providing nuanced additions to our findings on the basis of both the ActEU focus group data and the ActEU webscraped data from X. Each chapter points to key findings and learnings useful for policy recommendations, and chapter 5 concludes with a recap on these.

1.2 Literature review

In this brief literature review we point to some of the key findings in existing work that set the backdrop for our investigation of political trust as a mediator in changing participation patterns. To do so, we focus first on a general presentation of concepts of political trust and



distrust, and of participation. We then present some key existing work about the intersections between political trust and participation choices. These findings form a basis for our conceptual framework, presented in chapter 3.

1.2.1 What is political (dist)trust?

Work on political trust sheds light on the precise relationships and mechanisms at play, and thus point to how trust and distrust may function to mediate individuals' choices about their political participation (or lack thereof). Citrin and Stoker suggest that independently of any 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" (2018: 50). Likewise, political trust is "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: 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 (characterised by a degree of uncertainty about the object's future actions)" (van der Meer and Zmerli, 2017: 4).

This kind of trust therefore is frequently enshrined in the notion of political support (van der Meer and Zmerli, 2017; Norris, 2017), which is "a multidimensional phenomenon ranging on a continuum from the most diffuse to the most specific levels" (Norris, 2017: 23). Norris further suggests that political trust relies on five specific and distinct components of political support, each of which requires particular empirical measures. These components concern: 1) general feelings of belonging, "exemplified by feelings of national pride, patriotism, and identity"; 2) how far individuals agree with "core principles and normative values upon which the regime is based, including approval of democratic values and ideals"; 3) views of how a system performs, "exemplified by satisfaction with democratic governance and also general assessments about the workings of democratic processes and practices"; 4) "Confidence in regime institutions, notably the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, the security forces, as well as central, state and local governments"; and finally, 5) views on individual members of a political system including "specific party leaders, legislators, and public officials, as well as support for particular parties and for leadership elites and authorities in public sector agencies" (Norris, 2017: 23-24).

In a nutshell, the concept of political trust therefore "comprises the two most specific levels of political support, that is confidence in regime institutions and approval of incumbent office-holders" (Norris, 2017: 24). This notion can be 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: 24). In the specific case of government actors, trust is interpreted as a facilitating factor for legitimation processes (Hough *et al.*, 2010), or indeed as a dimension of legitimacy (Tyler and Jackson, 2013). However, a lack of definitional clarification tends to create conceptual confusions in the concerned literature: "for example, when distinguishing citizens' orientations towards governments and parliaments, common language often skims over, or fails to acknowledge, important



distinctions such as those concerning ideas of institutional *confidence* (which can be understood to represent belief in the capacity of an agency to perform effectively), *trust* (reflecting a rational or affective belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity of another party), *skepticism* (or suspended judgment), and *cynicism* (meaning jaded negativity)" (Norris, 2017: 19).

Work on the lack of political trust identifies two distinct terms: mistrust and distrust. The former expresses "doubt or skepticism about the trustworthiness of the other", while the latter indicates "a settled belief that the other is untrustworthy" (Citrin and Stoker, 2018: 50). The literature on political trust tends to be characterised by a recurring ambiguity in this direction: "Firstly, there is a disagreement whether citizen distrust of government is inimical to democracy [...] or whether [...] it is a welcome and necessary citizen stance to ensure democratic survival [...]. Second, the conceptual status of distrust has been brushed aside on the premise that it is simply the weakening of political trust. In most scholarly work, distrust has been equated with the absence of trust and, therefore, has seldom been considered or theorized in its own right. [...] [T]he overarching assumption has been that a theory of trust entails a theory of distrust. As a result, there has been little examination of the precise relationship between the two concepts" (Bertsou, 2019a: 214). Yet "treating trust and distrust as equivalent and conflating distrust with the lack of trust is inaccurate and problematic, both conceptually and empirically. [...] Lack of distrust does not extend to encompass relations of trust and lack of trust shouldn't be extended to include relations of distrust" (Bertsou, 2019a: 214). Thus, political distrust "is expressed in terms of negative expectations, lack of representation and feelings of betrayal. Attitudes of political distrust entail evaluations that follow technical, ethical and interest-based considerations, and furthermore, they set in motion a particular emotive and behavioural set of actions" (Bertsou, 2019b: 2). In addition, "[i]ndividuals lack confidence in an institution or individual when they believe the outputs of the institution or individual (that is, what they do in fact achieve as real-world actors) do not, or cannot, match the expectations those institutions foster about their normative goals and aims" (Wood, 2022: 30).

Key points in work that seeks to define political trust, mistrust, and distrust are that all trust relationships are relational and situational. For political trust, they concern the degree of belief that a political institution or actor is likely to act with integrity and efficiency. Political mistrust is a more ephemeral form of doubt about this, while political distrust is more deeply embedded. In that sense, it is more than a mere absence of trust, and instead a belief that a political actor or institution will never act with integrity or efficiency. As political actors and institutions are varied and numerous, how trust and distrust vary and shape political participation is a complex question.

1.2.2 What is political participation?

Before considering work on the complex interplays between political participation and political trust and distrust, some conceptualisation of political participation is also necessary. Existing literature highlights 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 Schlozman and Brady, 2022: 25). Verba *et al.* propose we classify modes of political



participation within four main categories, generally labelled as “voting”, “campaign”, “contact”, and “community” (Verba *et al.*, 1995: 72). Parry *et al.* suggest a different list of political participation modes: “voting”, “party campaigning”, “collective action”, “contacting”, “direct action”, and “political violence” (Parry *et al.*, 1992: 50).

Older work constituting the first explorations of political participation takes a different tack, departing from the idea of effort to define non-political activities. For instance, Verba and Nie exclude the following activities from political participation: ceremonial or support participation, participation in associations, illegal and illegitimate modes of action, and simple attitudes (Verba and Nie, 1973: 23). In a similar perspective, Parry *et al.* (1992: 16) also list of political activities considered as non-participatory: behaviour not aimed at influencing representatives, participation in the workplace, displaying interest in politics, expressing attitudes that support the functioning of democracy, and simple readiness or willingness to take action. To sum up, 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: 2). Brady offers a similar definition, conceptualising political participation as “action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes” (1999: 737).

However, more recent literature delivers a broader understanding of what political participation is. Indeed, “[t]he growing salience of government and politics for everyday life, the blurring of distinctions between private and public spheres, the increasing competences and resources (especially education) of citizens, and the availability of an abundance of political information resulted in a continuous expansion of available forms of participation. [...] The list of [...] examples [of political participation modes] can be extended simply – and with each additional form the problems of demarcating political participation become more evident” (van Deth, 2021: 2). Besides, “[d]emarcation problems are especially evident for many newer, “creative,” “personalized,” and “individualized” modes of participation [...]” (van Deth, 2021: 2).

Thus, 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. 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: 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: 353).

If we adopt a more restrictive viewpoint, the following criteria capture the essential features of political participation: “First, political participation is depicted as an activity (or ‘action’) [...]. Second, political participation is understood as something done by people in their role as



citizens, not as, say, politicians or professional lobbyists. Third, political participation should be voluntary and not enforced by law, rules, or threats. A fourth common aspect is that political participation deals with government, politics, or the state in the broad sense ('political system', 'policy process') and is neither restricted to specific phases (such as policy making, or the input side of the political system) nor to specific levels or areas (such as national elections or contact with public representatives and officials)" (van Deth, 2014: 351-352).

Siarambay offers a similar conceptualisation, defining political participation as "any action by citizens that is intended to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures, and is fostered by civic engagement" (Siarambay, 2020: 124). This author also suggests several criteria to identify acts considered as falling under political participation, specifying that it may be both on- or offline so long as the intention is to "affect the outcomes of political institutions or their structure", and must be performed mainly by citizens (Siarambay, 2020: 124). Distinguishing between political participation and civic engagement offers a new perspective. Here, Siarambay "restricts political participation to actions devoted to influencing the *outcomes of political institutions or their structures*, whereas civic engagement need not have this aim" (ibid).

Overall, the literature points to the great variation of forms of political participation. Rather than trying to produce exhaustive lists, more recent work points to the idea of identifying whether citizens intend to shape political decisions and structures as a more efficient way of defining action as political participation.

1.2.3 The interaction between political trust and political participation

In the 1970s, following the global protest waves that unfolded from the mid-1960s onwards, unconventional modes of political participation – such as involvement in social movements or participation in protest actions – emerged as common modes of political participation in Western liberal democracies, differentiating themselves with previously existing conventional modes – like campaigning or contacting officials (van Deth, 2001: 14). Then, in the 1990s, a new "expansion" of political participation occurred: "The disappearing borderline between political and non-political spheres of modern society and the revival of Tocquevillean and communitarian approaches lead to an expansion of political participation with 'civil' activities such as volunteering and social engagement [...]. The result of this stepwise expansion is that the domain of political participation grew from the not-so-simple-act-of voting [...] in the 1940s to almost every conceivable form of non-private activity imaginable by the end of the century" (van Deth, 2001: 6).

Nonetheless, drawing a clear theoretical distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of participation is far from obvious, as this divide "can be seen as a moving target. Indeed, certain forms of mobilization 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" (Giugni and Grasso, 2022: 9). 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: 9-10). Jennifer Oser prefers to distinguish institutionalised from non-institutionalised modes of political participation: "Institutionalized participation – also described as 'electoral-oriented,' 'traditional,' or 'conventional' – encompasses party



membership, and some studies also include electoral-adjacent activities, such as contacting public officials. Non-institutionalized participation – also described as ‘extra-electoral,’ ‘extra-institutionalized,’ or ‘unconventional’ – is most clearly identified as elite-challenging activities such as protesting against institutions or individuals in power, and some studies also include activities that have emerged more recently, such as political consumerism and online activism” (Oser, 2022: 817-818).

To sum up, conventional or institutionalised modes of political participation include “voting (in elections and referenda), participating in or volunteering for political parties (including standing for election), and signing petitions” (Roth and Saunders, 2022: 801). However, trying to define unconventional or non-institutionalised participation tends to be much more complex. If we articulate this concept with the notion of protest participation, we can establish “a list of specific political activities that are considered as being unconventional or noninstitutional (as opposed to conventional or institutionalized forms such as voting). The most typical forms include attending public demonstrations (lawful or illegal), taking part in strikes, and participating in sit-ins, blockades, or other confrontational actions, but often other forms are also mentioned” (Giugni and Grasso, 2022: 397). On the basis of these clearer concepts of political trust, distrust and political participation, we can now turn to the literature on the interactions between these. Political trust has frequently been described as an important influence on individuals’ conventional participation. As Oscar W. Gabriel explains, “conventional political participation in general [...] as well as specific forms of conventional political activity [...] are fostered by political trust” (Gabriel, 2017: 236). Such a viewpoint is particularly noticeable in cultural theories of democracy, characterised by an “approach [which] looks at trust and participation as closely interrelated parts of a syndrome of civic attitudes and behaviors fostering the stability and performance of democracy” (Gabriel, 2017: 229). If we focus on a particular example of conventional participation (voting), we can refer to the close relationship linking political decisions with political trust by stressing its heuristic dimension (Rudolph, 2017).

In that vein, Thomas J. 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: 200). Following this theoretical viewpoint, trust can be considered as a 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: 200) If the described process “implies a linkage between political trust and beliefs about government credibility” (Rudolph, 2017: 200), and if the electoral decision is based on “policy judgments”, political trust therefore can be mobilized as a “useful heuristic”, because it “reduces complex policy judgments to a simple question of trust” (Rudolph, 2017: 209).

Yet the relationship between electoral participation and political trust appears as much more ambiguous when we consider scholarship on votes for challengers and/or populist parties. 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: 244). However, anti-elitism has been shown to be one of the main determinants of the vote for populist parties (Bélanger, 2017: 247-248). Consequently, political distrust is described as much a cause as a consequence of support for these kinds of parties (Rooduijn, 2013), and “political distrust might also lead some citizens to not vote at all” (Bélanger, 2017: 251). Thus, by taking into account research that shows how “political distrust at the individual level is linked to both challenger party support and abstention”, Eric Bélanger hypothesises 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: 251). In a broader perspective, the theory of political support-alienation points to a similar finding: (dis)trust should be considered as a factor determining the degree of political involvement. Depending on the state of the relationship between participation and trust, “political apathy, conventional political activity or political protest will result” (Gabriel, 2017: 229).

If political trust is expected to feed political participation by voting, the reverse relationship is supposedly at work where unconventional modes of participation are concerned. Here, low levels of political trust have been found to favour unconventional participation based on research on protest movements that emerged 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: 233).

Indeed, a weakening of political trust was noted by several analysts, and this process was interpreted as the causal origin of two trends: the development of “elite challenging behavior” referring to the rise of protest activities, and the refusal of “elite directed participation” exemplified by conventional modes of civic participation (Inglehart, 1997). In this context, unconventional participation was interpreted as the normal political behaviour of distrustful (and politically dissatisfied) post-materialist citizens (Gabriel, 2017: 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: 235-236).

This reasoning on political distrust and protest is also demonstrated in empirical studies about the psychological motivations of individuals to take part in protest. These have frequently shown 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: 161). 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). Likewise, 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 institutionalised participation, as well as a negative relationship between strong trust and non-institutionalised 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.

Scholarship on collective action and on contentious politics in particular reveals more nuanced views of the relationships between political trust and participation by paying attention to organisations rather than individuals. Here discussions that are directly about political trust as an element of individual decision-making are necessarily absent. However, approaches that seek to explain collective action and protest raise important points about how trust is a mediator rather than the sole element at play in participation choices. The rational turn in the study of social movements sought precisely to move away from assumptions based in the linkages between political distrust, protest, and processes of radicalisation. Referring once more to the widespread protests and movements of the 1960s and 1970s, scholars pointed to the fact that factors including political distrust which lies at the base of collective grievances cannot explain the timing and appearance of protest. The grievances expressed by the women's liberation movements, for example, were hardly new to these decades. The question thus becomes less why protest, but why protest now?

Resource Mobilization Theory, first developed in the 1970s but subsequently adapted and applied to much more recent cases, is the first to reason about what else explains protest beyond grievances (or political distrust). Rooted in organisational sociology, the approach considers the range of material and immaterial resources necessary to overcome the classical freerider issue linked to collective action (Edwards, McCarthy, and Mataic, 2019). A second approach to protest as rational political action is the political process, or political opportunity, approach. In these approaches, scholars have sought to understand the choice to engage in protest or other forms of contentious politics or 'unconventional' political participation by considering collective perceptions of political contexts. Various aspects of a political context linked to the features of political institutions on one hand, and to political actors on the other, determine how 'open' or 'closed' a context is to protest. These include the separation of powers, the structure of party systems, the political culture, the proximity of elections, cultures of protest policing, and more (McAdam and Tarrow, 2019). Protest, in this view, may appear both in more open and more closed political contexts: implicit in these discussions is the idea that where collective actors consider a context open, they feel that protest will be responded to by political actors and institutions – a calculation that presupposes some level of political trust or at least confidence that responses will be seen. Protest closed political contexts instead points to the idea of political distrust, and the kinds of correlations suggested earlier in relation to protest as a choice of expression for those who feel alienated within a political system. Equally interesting are approaches to protest at different levels which infuse this rational turn in the study of protest from learnings in international relations. Thus, boomerang models and two-level games shed light on how distrustful protesters may engage in venue shopping, engaging with political actors and institutions at levels they are more trustful of to gain leverage with actors and institutions they are distrustful of (della Porta, Parks and Portos, 2024). This also introduces the idea of diffusion, and that the choice to take part in protests may also be connected to the spread of a cycle of contention and the perception of the importance of certain moments (e.g. della Porta, 2020).



1.2.4 Identity and collective determinants of political trust

To fully understand political trust also requires attention to both collective and identity determinants. An important body of literature highlights the effect of collective and identity determinants on political trust. Concerning identity factors, several works show that differentiated levels of trust towards diverse kinds of political institutions are determined by the strength of emotional attachment expressed by citizens towards them (Harteveld, van der Meer and De Vries, 2013). The same trend is observed for the international sphere. Thus, trust towards institutions embodying global governance tends to be conditioned by identity orientations. A similar influence of identity features has been noted about the European level of public governance: indeed, scholars find that trust towards European political institutions is positively (and strongly) correlated with the depth of identification with Europe (Verhaegen, Hooghe and Quintelier, 2017). Beyond public opinion-related features, some culturally based characteristics tend to feed political trust in other levels of decision-making, such as the subnational. For instance, when a given region is characterised by a distinct local language, its inhabitants are particularly inclined to claim increasing powers for regional political institutions (Schakel and Brown, 2022), which exemplifies the relationship between political trust and institutions' legitimisation on an identity basis. Nonetheless, not all identity factors favour political trust: on the contrary, distinct forms of identity can feed opposite patterns. These contradictory patterns are particularly noticeable on the national level: for example, a strong civic national identity positively impacts levels of political trust, while a national identity structured around ethnic boundaries has a negative effect on political trust (Berg and Hjerm, 2020). Different kinds of feelings of national identification therefore favour distinct impacts on political trust: divergent trends are observed concerning the link between political trust and national attachment, national pride and national chauvinism (Gustavsson and Stendahl, 2020). Besides, trust tends to be relatively high in national contexts marked by inclusive approaches to immigrants' integration (McLaren, 2017).

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1.2.5 Identity and collective determinants of political participation

A large body of literature has highlighted the influence of collective determinants for political participation of different types. Indeed, "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: 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 mobilization that, in turn, affect political participation" (Lehman Schlozman and Brady, 2022: 33). Nonetheless, "social networks do not just have mobilizing effects and they can also exert social pressures that might contribute to refraining from participation" (Bridgman and Stolle, 2022: 703).

The centrality of informal networks for political participation is even stronger where these ties allow for the transmission of political information, feed incidental political exposure or even political consciousness, and thereby contribute to create collective identities (Passy, 2003; Bridgman and Stolle, 2022: 710). The concept of collective identity refers to the way "individuals feel and think about groups: both their own identification with a group whose status, successes, and failures translate into the individual's own, but also their attribution of



groupness to others (outgroups)” (Jasper and Zhelnina, 2022: 652). Such feelings often constitute “the most stable and salient of long-run allegiances, at least in politics. They help us define who we are, and our basic values and goals. We tend to love or at least like the groups we belong to. [...] We also construct identities for outsiders, as out-groups, and we tend to contrast them with our own groups, expecting to dislike, hate, mistrust, or be uncomfortable with them” (Jasper and Zhelnina, 2022: 652). Given the ways that networks define our identities, it follows that “political actions and decisions are always entwined with emotions. [...] Social identities are among the most salient factors shaping these emotions, and so they are among the primary causes of political participation” (Jasper and Zhelnina, 2022: 662). Socialisation is frequently mentioned as an additional factor explaining individual propensities to political participation. Understood as a process (Muxel, 2022: 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: 689-690). Serra and Smets identify the influence of different elements for political socialisation, focusing on (1) formative years, (2) socialising agents, and (3) generation and cohort effects (Serra and Smets, 2022: 545-548).

Among the collective and identity factors that feed political participation, culture and values are much discussed. Franziska Deutsch explains that “[c]ultural value orientations are an important independent variable for studying political participation in their own right” (Deutsch, 2022: 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, Richards, and Jungblut, 2022: 630). Political values are perceived as having “substantial explanatory power for understanding individuals’ propensities to engage in different forms of political action” (Heath, Richards, and Jungblut, 2022: 649), and a set of particular values were identified as linked with several modes of political participation: “Values are strongly linked to different forms of political action, democratic values being particularly relevant to electoral participation, and postmaterialist values to non-electoral participation” (Heath, Richards, and Jungblut, 2022: 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, Richards, and Jungblut, 2022: 649). In the literature on collective action, the framing work done by social movements and other collective actors to make their claims resonate with societal norms is thus seen as crucial to their successful mobilisation and recruitment of supporters (e.g Chong and Druckman, 2007).

Identity characteristics also correlate with different modes of political participation: for example, self-identification with a minority population can be reinterpreted as a shortcut for final electoral decisions in a context of political uncertainty (Birnir, 2009). This influence of self-identification with a minority group on political participation is noted for minority populations of course (Masuoka, 2008), but also (paradoxically) for majority ones – such as white people who identify themselves as a minority in the US (Berry, Ebner and Cornelius, 2021). However, and even if the contradictory effects of group identity and group consciousness on political participation are highlighted (Valdez, 2011), these identity features tend to interact with the broader context in given countries. For example, the way societies “conceive of racial categories and structures is a function of their unique sociopolitical histories and processes” (Abrajano, Leighley, Markarian, 2022: 607). An intersectional analytical perspective on political participation can thus reveal much about the “distribution



of power and resources in society” (Slaughter and Brown, 2022: 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, Saunders, 2022: 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 and borne differently by different social groupings, as are the benefits. It may be that a “privileged person can invest more time in volunteering to slowly build a career than can someone less privileged” (Roth and Saunders, 2022: 808), or indeed that a less privileged person can ill afford not to act in some way that is perceived as available to them. This inequality in the individual potential for political participation is therefore articulated alongside inequalities in 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: 797). Likewise, social inequalities, but also educational factors, have been identified as influential for political participation patterns, such as turnout (Evans and Hepplewhite, 2022: 579-581). In a similar perspective, individual social positions have been studied as an explanatory factor for non-voting (Mayer, 2022: 70-72) and protest (Mayer, 2022: 74).

Different psychosocial and emotional profiles have also been found to feed distinct attitudes towards political participation. First, emotions are highly influential for political behaviours due to the determining effect of feelings on cognitive processes (Damasio, 1995). 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: 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, both positive and negative emotions 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 mobilization and action to achieve the set goal” (Bar-Tal *et al*, 2007: 449). Likewise, individuals who display a strong openness to experience “will participate in politics if it promises new input, new experiences, and intellectual stimuli” (Ackermann, 2022: 615). Besides, people expressing high degrees of extroversion “should particularly enjoy social forms of political action. They value political participation as an opportunity for interaction” (Ackermann, 2022: 616).

1.3 Participatory trust, group-specific triggers, motivations and emotions, and changing patterns of political participation: situating the research approach

Kristina Weissenbach

In this report we investigate the relationship between trust and political participation. Methodologically, we make use of an innovative combination of different data sources available in the ActEU project to cover certain dimensions of this relationship. Empirically, we investigate different aspects of this relationship at the group level: we explore the trust-participation patterns our data point to for different groups in society and seek to highlight changing patterns of citizen's political participation. At the core of this report are the following research questions:



Which triggers, motivations, emotions and dynamics are behind changing patterns of participation in different groups in society? Does the 'supply side' of political participation address the triggers, motivations, and emotions of the demand side? Do we see gender-related variations? (T 3.4)

What are the relations between participation choices and trust for different societal groups? Do we observe that changing levels of trust and changing patterns of citizens' political participation are mediated by socio-demographic, socio-economic and other pertinent factors? (T. 3.5)

What is the role of political or activist affiliations in these trust-participation patterns? (T3.6)

The literature at the intersection of works on (dis-)trust and political participation (see chapter 2) points to two specific findings which are of particular importance for discussing these questions.

First, we know that the role of political participation within democracy is shifting, and with it the relationship of citizens to their political system, institutions, and actors (Butzlaff, 2022). Non-representative, rather unconventional, unmediated, and sometimes contentious and direct forms of participation and collective action have become increasingly attractive and accepted (Bosi and Zamponi, 2015: 2020) – and underline that the social compromise at the core of liberal representative democracies is increasingly considered to be malfunctioning. Second, studies which focus on collective and group identity perspectives as well as communities or informal networks argue that group identities and cultural values have high explanatory power for understanding why citizens become politically engaged in different forms of action (Deutsch, 2022; Heath, Richards, and Jungblut, 2022).

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From the perspective of research on participation, engagement, and democratic values, it is thus highly interesting to see whether citizens – or certain groups in society – (continue to) consider conventional political participation, often in spaces close to the institutions of representative democracy, as desirable or effective. If they do, what does this mean for their overall trust in representative democracy, political institutions and processes, and political actors? If they no longer see these types of political participation as effective and desirable, do they opt instead 'outsider strategies' which are often (but not necessarily) unconventional and sometimes more contentious forms of participation? Does that in turn matter for citizens' trust in representative democracy?

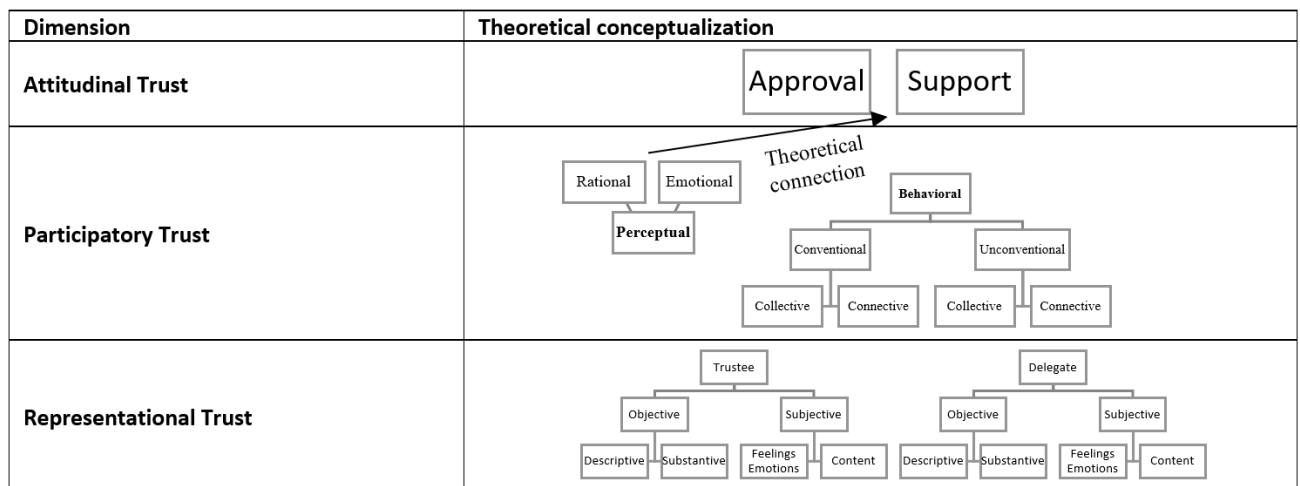
To delve into some of these questions, this report is based on a broad understanding of political participation following more recent developments in the literature as described in chapter 2. To investigate complex and overlapping views of how trust and political participation are linked we build on research at their intersection. Here, scholars emphasise that different aspects of political participation on the demand side (e.g. identity characteristics, distribution of power, path dependencies, participation routines, feelings and identities) (Abrajano, Leighley, and Markarian, 2020; Slaughter and Brown, 2022: 738) and the 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 (Weissenbach and Berkowitz, 2023) support the theoretical assumption that various rational and emotional group-specific triggers and motivations (perceptual side) matter for citizens to pick a certain participation option (behavioural side) and, overall, whether they have "confidence in regime institutions and approval of incumbent office-holders" (Norris, 2017: 24) – which is our definition of trust.



Nevertheless, 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 et al. (2025) argue that we should combine attitudinal and behavioural aspects when investigating political disaffection, and Weissenbach and Berkowitz (2023) distinguish between three different concepts of political trust: attitudinal trust, participatory trust and representational trust. In this report we focus on participatory trust.

Participatory trust relates to the relationship between political participation and trust and can be described as the *participation-related aspects that play a role for citizens' (dis)trust in representative democracy, political institutions and political actors*. Overall, we conceptualise participatory trust *as a process rather than as a status and distinguish between the demand side of political participation (citizens' demand for certain participation options) and the supply side of participation (institutions – formal or informal – within or outside the system of representative democracy offer and call for different options for participation to citizens)*. 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 different ways in the past tend to carry on engaging (Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; Butzlaff, 2024; Butzlaff et al, 2024). It also accounts for the dense literature highlighting the influence of (inter-)individual determinants on political participation. Such a stance is summarised 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). Figure 1.1 shows how participatory trust is understood in more detail and place it in relation to the other trust concepts used in the ActEU project.

Figure 1-1 Conceptualisation of participatory trust alongside attitudinal and representational trust



(Source: Weissenbach and Berkowitz 2023)

Following our definition of participation outlined above, we break this definition down further into a behavioural side of participation, defined as the actual engagement and involvement within a political or social system (van de Walle, 2017: 121), and a perceptual side of participation, which refers to attitudes towards different forms of political participation as they are usually described in the literature. Our argument is that the behavioural side of participation is triggered by the perceptual side e.g. rational and emotional perceptions.

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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. This approach complements a considerable body of literature that discusses the individual determinants of the legitimation and acceptability of different forms of political participation – wither less conventional or more contentious. For instance, among these factors, scholars point to the respective effects of education and political interest (Arbache, 2014), dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Pajak-Patkowska et al, 2018), the degree of participation in civil society organisations and lack of satisfaction with the government (Stockemer, 2014), or voters' ideological preferences and electoral choices (Memoli, 2016).

On the perceptual side of participation, we refer to subjective experiences and feelings. It addresses statements on how individuals perceive their participation options in representative democracy. These include **rational** and **emotional** aspects, for example fun, anger, disinterest, time constraints, solidarity, self-interest, or efficacy.

How do we build on this complex understanding of participation as including many different types of action, and on a complex and interlinked concept of participatory trust which links political trust with forms of participation through behaviour and perceptions (emotions)? We do so by turning to focus on the group level which we have not yet discussed in depth in work package 3 deliverables. Different group compositions and definitions are taken into account here: We look first at the links between socio-demographic groups (age, class, education, employment status, gender), political trust, and different types of participation by drawing on existing survey data. We then take a look at the supply side of political participation by focusing on calls for action by different actors on X, using the ActEU webscraped data, and linking these calls for action to political trust. Finally, we take a deep



dive into the specific role of triggers, emotions and motivations for participation behaviour in four specific groups, drawing on the ActEU focus groups data: a committed group of citizens (actively involved in forms of political participation), an average group (mean levels of trust in the political system), a disconnected group (characterised by political disinterest, no participation) and we also zoom into the specific role of triggers, emotions and motivations for participation behaviour in the group of women. Based on semantic patterns in the first three groups (how do citizens in the committed, average, disconnected group narrate about triggers, emotions and motivations for participation?) we investigate the ActEU-web-scraped data from X. By creating semantic groups and communities we are able to combine these two data sources and enrich our knowledge of perceptual and behavioural aspects of participatory trust and triggers, emotions and motivations for different participation behaviour in different groups offline and online.

2 Data Mobilised for the Mixed-Methods Design: Exploratory and sequential

Ruth Berkowitz, Daniel Gayo-Avello, Louisa Parks, Max-Valentin Robert & Kristina Weissenbach

In this chapter we provide brief overviews of the different sources of data mobilised for this report, namely the publicly available datasets on political trust drawn on in the ActEU project (section 2.1); the ActEU focus group data (section 2.2), and the ActEU web-scraped data (section 2.3). We provide chapter-specific methodological information in the separate substantive chapters.

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2.1 Overview of the publicly available datasets on political trust

Max-Valentin Robert

In this report we draw on three European publicly available datasets to investigate the links between political trust and political participation choices for different groups in society. The first dataset is the *Standard Eurobarometer*, where trust towards political institutions at different scales is considered for survey rounds since the beginning of the 2000s as follows: regional or local public authorities (since 2002), political parties (since 2003), the (national) government (since 2001), the (national) parliament (since 2001) and the European Union (since 2023). The question dealing with trust towards the previously mentioned institutions is: “How much trust do you have in certain institutions? For each of the following institutions, do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?” The two answer modalities proposed here are the following: “Tend to trust” and “Tend not to trust”.

The *European Social Survey* (ESS) also allows us to follow the evolution of political trust towards different political actors and institutions, but only where national and European levels are concerned. Indeed, since 2002, trust towards the (national) parliament and the European Parliament have been included. In addition, trust towards politicians and political parties have been included, respectively since 2016 and 2018. The question examining political trust is: “Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust”. Answers are given on an eleven-point scale ranging from the response “No trust at all” (coded as 00) to “Complete trust” (coded as 10).

Finally, we use the *European Values Study* (EVS), which is also characterised by a focus on national and European scales, while the subnational level is not investigated. The evolution



of trust towards the (national) parliament has featured here since 1981, while trust towards the (national) government has been included since 2008. Trust towards the European Community/European Union has been featured since 1990. Furthermore, trust on political parties was included from 2008. The question dealing with political trust is: *"Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all?"* The answer modalities proposed here are the following: *"a great deal", "quite a lot", "not very much" and "not at all"*.

2.2 Overview of the ActEU Focus Group data

Ruth Berkowitz & Kristina Weissenbach

In the first phase of the ActEU project, which follows an exploratory sequential design, a total of 16 focus groups were conducted with four different groups of citizens each in Czechia, France, Germany, and Greece, each lasting 120 minutes. The country selection for focus groups was primarily guided by ensuring representation across all geographical regions of the European Union. The four focus groups in each country involved a total of 93 participants.

Participants were recruited using national recruitment agencies, and were run in cooperation with the market research institute IPSOS. Participants received incentives for their participation that varied by country. In each country citizens from four different target groups were recruited:

1. A group of 'disconnected citizens characterised by political disinterest, no participation, and social marginalisation;
2. An 'average' group in terms of levels of trust in the political system, without or with little political involvement;
3. A 'committed' or engaged group of citizens actively involved in either traditional representative institutions such as political parties or other modes of participation such as protest and activism.
4. A group of women citizens, with varying levels of political engagement.

The citizens self-selected into these groups by answering a questionnaire (see Weissenbach and Berkowitz, 2023). The transcripts of the focus groups were then analysed using a thematic qualitative content analysis approach in the software programme MaxQDA. The analysis was carried out in an abductive (Reichertz, 2004) and iterative way (Braun and Clarke, 2006), applying a hand-coding approach following a codebook developed by an ActEU taskforce of country experts on Czechia, Greece, France and Germany as well as researchers from the ActEU consortium with a background in the fields of participation, representation and attitudes. Visualisations of the findings were produced using MaxQDA and ATLAS.ti.

The 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 forms of political participation within the institutions of representative democracy, under what circumstances do they lose trust in institutionalised forms of participation and turn to forms outside of the institutions of representative democracy, which often are unconventional and rather contentious? When do citizens turn to more contentious forms of political participation? What alternative forms of engagement do they demand, hope for and consider



attractive? The measurements and findings regarding these issues are discussed in chapter 4.

2.3 Overview of the ActEU web-scraped data

Daniel Gayo-Avello & Louisa Parks

In this report we also explore the relationships between different groups, emotions, triggers, and motivations with political trust and participation choices using the web-scraped data. Specifically, we draw on the web-scraped data from X, part of the broader ActEU dataset which covers ten European countries and nine languages, and includes data not only from X but also from public Telegram groups, news websites and the institutional websites of different political actors of interest within the project.

The data collection followed an actor-based approach: as the interest of the ActEU project is in different forms of political actors and their political discourses around particular policy issues, departing from a selection of actors and then identifying utterances about the policy areas of interest guaranteed a more comprehensive dataset compared to a keyword-based approach. The selection of actors for inclusion in the dataset aimed to capture a broad spectrum of political and societal discourse across the ten target countries. It included key political and societal actors such as governments, public administrations, politicians in office at the time of data collection, as well as political parties, civil society actors, and media outlets. These actors spanned the European, national, and regional levels. The actors were chosen by first leveraging Wikidata, using SPARQL queries to produce lists of potential actors. These lists were then further honed using additional relevance criteria (such as PageRank for Wikidata entities and archival frequency in the Wayback Machine if the entity had an associated URL). These lists were then curated by consortium members with expertise on the different national political landscapes. During this curation process difficulties in identifying 'fringe' or contentious political actor communities emerged. To address this, a pilot crawl was carried out on 2,665 Twitter accounts in July 2023, including information about reactions to these accounts' tweets from common users. During this process, the Twitter interaction graph—based on replies and mentions—was updated every 24 hours. PageRank was computed, and new accounts were identified, reviewed, and, if deemed relevant according to the predefined criteria, added to the list of accounts to capture. As a result, 1,863 new accounts were added during the pilot.

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On the basis of this complete list of seed accounts (i.e. the accounts held by the political actors of interest in the project) two distinct data gathering phases took place. First, data was collected using the Twitter Academic Research API (Parack, 2021). The API collection phase ran through to 21 September 2023 and captured the original seed account tweets as well as common user replies, mentions, retweets (now reposts), and quote tweets (now quotes) from our selected accounts, as well as mentions, retweets, and quote tweets directed at them. Engagement metrics, including the numbers of likes, retweets, and replies, were recorded alongside metadata extracted from user profiles, such as bio information, location, follower and following counts, and account verification status. This information was later enriched by computing PageRank centrality scores from the interaction graph.

After the loss of API access data was gathered using `ntscraper1`, a Python package that extracts Twitter data via Nitter, an alternative front-end that allows access to tweets without

¹ <https://github.com/bocchilorenzo/ntscraper>



API credentials. While a viable alternative, the coverage during this phase faced significant constraints. Nitter is intended as an end-user interface, meaning that the data obtained through ntscraper was less rich and detailed (for further details see Gayo Avello et al, 2024). It is important to note that after February 2024 scraping X data at scale was no longer feasible, and the subset after this date is rather brittle. Despite these issues, the dataset remains one of the most comprehensive collections of European political discourse on X during the monitored period, encompassing both elite narratives and public reactions. Overall, the X subset contains nearly 27 million tweets from 2 million users, collected from accounts associated with political actors, including governments, political parties, media, and NGOs, as well as mentions, replies, retweets, and quote tweets involving these accounts.

After the data collection was completed a strategy for its annotation was developed. Given the size of the dataset this strategy involved limited manual annotation following a guide developed within the ActEU consortium subsequently used to train a supervised model for automated annotation of the entire dataset.² The guide aimed to ensure the consistent and accurate annotation of online texts on climate change, gender issues, and migration beyond basic topic and sentiment analysis. The annotation provides information on the types of texts, the policy area covered, subtopics, geography, focus, issue position, general tone, political trust, populism, and types of participation, and some topic-specific information. After adequate time to review and ask questions about the guide and a test phase, each task was completed by three different annotators (native speakers from each of the ten countries), employing a consensus coding process with arbitration (Krippendorff, 2018) to optimise the allocated annotation hours of 100 hours per country. These manual annotations were then used to train several supervised classifiers to perform a similar annotation of the remaining texts. It is important to note that only those texts identified as dealing with the policy issue areas of interest to the ActEU project – climate change, gender, and migration – were fully annotated. Texts that were not classified in one of these three areas were not annotated further. The below table summarises the proportions of tweets annotated as belonging to one of the policy areas of interest in the project for each of the languages and regions covered in the dataset.

Table 2-1 Disaggregated Twitter data by language, region, and topic, showing each region's share of tweets in a given language and the proportion annotated with one of the three main topics: climate, gender, or migration (UniOvi)

Language	Region	Tweets	Region's share	Climate annotated	Climate annotated (%)	Gender annotated	Gender annotated (%)	Migration annotated	Migration annotated (%)	Non annotated	Non annotated (%)
cs	CZ	701480	93,4%	18465	2,6%	40969	5,8%	31565	4,5%	610481	87,0%
cs	other	21682	2,9%	444	2,0%	1255	5,8%	986	4,5%	18997	87,6%

² Consortium members from the University of Oviedo, the University of Saarland, Paris Lodron University of Salzburg, and the University of Trento, with additional input from partners at the Institute of International Relations Prague regarding populism.



cs	rest of EU	19116	2,5%	553	2,9%	801	4,2%	831	4,3%	16931	88,6%
cs	unknown	8718	1,2%	216	2,5%	319	3,7%	316	3,6%	7867	90,2%
da	DK	272966	89,7%	31251	11,4%	20899	7,7%	35691	13,1%	185125	67,8%
da	rest of EU	15377	5,1%	755	4,9%	336	2,2%	664	4,3%	13622	88,6%
da	other	10530	3,5%	890	8,5%	570	5,4%	1259	12,0%	7811	74,2%
da	unknown	5424	1,8%	337	6,2%	240	4,4%	338	6,2%	4509	83,1%
de	DE	40824 68	81,8%	40392 5	9,9%	144917	3,5%	290914	7,1%	324271 2	79,4%
de	AT	44482 1	8,9%	50140	11,3%	16294	3,7%	26477	6,0%	351910	79,1%
de	other	28730 7	5,8%	29308	10,2%	10450	3,6%	20816	7,2%	226733	78,9%
de	rest of EU	105075	2,1%	8750	8,3%	2919	2,8%	6117	5,8%	87289	83,1%
de	unknown	69170	1,4%	5424	7,8%	2242	3,2%	4309	6,2%	57195	82,7%
el	GR	224217	92,7%	5896	2,6%	4614	2,1%	7259	3,2%	20644 8	92,1%
el	unknown	6192	2,6%	155	2,5%	191	3,1%	245	4,0%	5601	90,5%
el	other	5974	2,5%	133	2,2%	81	1,4%	261	4,4%	5499	92,0%
el	rest of EU	5521	2,3%	206	3,7%	82	1,5%	270	4,9%	4963	89,9%
en	unknown	767152	49,2%	43617	5,7%	31176	4,1%	58386	7,6%	633973	82,6%
en	EU	43580 6	28,0%	31565	7,2%	15067	3,5%	24188	5,6%	36498 6	83,7%



en	other	356123	22,8%	27867	7,8%	13462	3,8%	26188	7,4%	28860 6	81,0%
es	ES	538949 6	86,5%	142715	2,6%	314510	5,8%	153362	2,8%	47789 09	88,7%
es	other	594495	9,5%	15963	2,7%	32872	5,5%	16376	2,8%	529284	89,0%
es	unkno wn	128978	2,1%	3323	2,6%	5631	4,4%	3636	2,8%	116388	90,2%
es	rest of EU	117678	1,9%	3401	2,9%	4872	4,1%	3082	2,6%	106323	90,4%
fi	FI	10407 66	95,3%	45540	4,4%	50720	4,9%	102867	9,9%	841639	80,9%
fi	other	25856	2,4%	1005	3,9%	1275	4,9%	2953	11,4%	20623	79,8%
fi	rest of EU	19180	1,8%	839	4,4%	783	4,1%	1509	7,9%	16049	83,7%
fi	unkno wn	5866	0,5%	223	3,8%	164	2,8%	293	5,0%	5186	88,4%
fr	FR	50368 45	86,6%	246123	4,9%	27495 4	5,5%	361669	7,2%	415409 9	82,5%
fr	other	47900 6	8,2%	22681	4,7%	25075	5,2%	34840	7,3%	396410	82,8%
fr	unkno wn	186791	3,2%	6886	3,7%	8937	4,8%	14763	7,9%	156205	83,6%
fr	rest of EU	111547	1,9%	4971	4,5%	5049	4,5%	6742	6,0%	94785	85,0%
it	IT	198415 4	91,2%	95408	4,8%	98008	4,9%	131704	6,6%	165903 4	83,6%
it	other	95106	4,4%	4446	4,7%	4425	4,7%	6552	6,9%	79683	83,8%
it	rest of EU	63123	2,9%	2043	3,2%	1650	2,6%	2437	3,9%	56993	90,3%
it	unkno wn	33886	1,6%	992	2,9%	1157	3,4%	1530	4,5%	30207	89,1%



pl	PL	3216830	93,2%	53344	1,7%	92722	2,9%	155498	4,8%	2915266	90,6%
pl	other	115271	3,3%	1777	1,5%	3543	3,1%	5375	4,7%	104576	90,7%
pl	rest of EU	79496	2,3%	1274	1,6%	1826	2,3%	3398	4,3%	72998	91,8%
pl	unknown	40713	1,2%	549	1,3%	1410	3,5%	1924	4,7%	36830	90,5%

The annotations of the data provide us with general information of great use when beginning to explore this rich dataset. However, initial checks reveal that there does still appear to be some degree of inaccuracy in the annotations. For this reason, in each of the chapters that draw on the data from X we elaborate further strategies for analysing smaller samples of relevant tweets for our research questions. These are accordingly described in each chapter.

3 Decreasing trust, political participation, and sociodemographic characteristics

Max-Valentin Robert

Contributor: Louisa Parks

3.1 Overview of the publicly available datasets

In this chapter we examine political trust and participation according to different sociodemographic characteristics using publicly available datasets as described in chapter 4. Specifically, I draw on the *Standard Eurobarometer* which has included questions on trust towards political institutions at different levels since the beginning of the 2000s: regional or local public authorities (since 2002), political parties (since 2003), the (national) government (since 2001), the (national) parliament (since 2001), but also EU-level institutions, such as the European Union itself, the European Commission, the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Central Bank (since 1999). The questions on respondents trust towards the previously mentioned institutions are formulated in the following way: “*How much trust do you have in certain institutions? For each of the following institutions, do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?*” The two answer proposed are: “*Tend to trust*” and “*Tend not to trust*”.

The *European Social Survey* (ESS) also allows us to follow the evolution of political trust towards different political actors and institutions, but only at national and European levels. Questions on these have been included since 2002. In addition, trust towards politicians and political parties have been included, , since 2016 and 2018 respectively. The questions examining political trust are as follows: “*Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10*



how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust. Answers are provided along an eleven-point scale ranging from “No trust at all” (coded as 00) to “Complete trust” (coded as 10).

The *European Values Study* (EVS) also asks for trust at national and European level but not on the subnational level. The EVS has including questions on trust towards the (national) parliament since 1981, and trust towards the (national) government since 2008. Trust towards the European Community/European Union has also been included since 1990. Furthermore, trust on political parties is also asked, though these questions are more recent (from 2008). The question dealing with political trust are: “Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all?” Options for answering are “a great deal”, “quite a lot”, “not very much” and “not at all”.

3.1 The sociodemographic determinants of political participation

3.2.1 Voting

In the following analyses, which draw on all the waves of the *Standard Eurobarometer* from 2011 to 2023, the dependent variable is the declaration of having voted during the last national election. We opted for this variable because, despite the Europeanisation process and the increasing decentralisation trend in several European countries, national elections remain as the most determinant of public policies, and the elections in which citizens continue to participate the most. Based on the literature (Hadjar and Beck, 2010; Gallego, 2010; Mayer, 2011; Beauregard, 2014; Perrson, 2015; Gunther et al, 2015; Lindgren, Oskarsson, and Perrson, 2019), we use the most cited factors affecting turnout as the independent variables. This results in the following selection: level of education – on one end low levels of having received only pre-primary education, primary education or lower secondary education – or a high level – having graduated from university with any level of degree, age – with “young” voters between 15 and 24 years old or “old” being aged older than 55 years old, gender-self-identifying as a woman or man, and class-self-placement as working-lower middle class or of the higher/upper middle class.



Table 3-1 Individual sociodemographic characteristics and voting in the last national election (Standard Eurobarometer: 2011-2023)

	Voted in the last national election															
Low educ.	-0.020	**														
	0.001															
High educ.			-0.020	**												
			0.001													
Young					-0.012	**										
					0.001											
Old							0.012	**								
							0.000									
Man									0.002	**						
									0.000							
Woman											0.002	**				
											0.000					
Working/Lower middle													-0.007	**		
													0.000			
Higher/Upper middle															0.009	**
															0.001	
Interc.	0.020	**	0.020	**	0.021	**	0.015	**	0.019	**	0.019	**	0.023	**	0.019	**



	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Nb. of obs.	848246	848246	848246	848246	848246	848246	848246	848246

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



The regression analyses gathering all these factors highlight that the following sociodemographic elements tend to increase the likelihood of having voted in the last national election: being aged over 55 years and self-identifying with the higher or upper middle class. On the contrary, being aged between 15 and 24 years old, self-identifying with the working class or the lower middle class, but also (interestingly) having received a low level of education as well as having graduated from the university lower the likelihood to have voted in the last national election. This paradoxical result could be explained by two opposite patterns: the decline of electoral participation could be jointly fed by depoliticised citizens characterised by a poor educational capital and by highly sceptical individuals socialised with the ideal of the “critical” citizen. Brigitte Geissel explains that critical citizens are characterised by the following features: being jointly dissatisfied towards the political system and attentive towards political debates (Geissel, 2008). Critical citizens also combine support for democracy and cognitive mobilisation, due to their levels of education and political interest (Dalton, 2014). Among younger respondents, of course, not having voted may in part be due to not having been of legal age to vote at previous election rounds (however, it would be difficult for us to assess the potential effect of this factor, as we only have information about age brackets, and not the precise age itself), while age may also shape their answers about education levels.

3.2.2 Demonstrations and boycotts

To deliver analyses benefiting from diverse – and complementary – perspectives, we decided to run analyses mobilising an alternative dataset, but still dealing with ongoing trends within European public opinion. In the next set of analyses we draw on the European Social Survey (ESS) and focus on its last wave (2023). We mobilized the following dependent variables: having already participated in a legal or unlawful public demonstration, as well as having already taken part in a boycott. The independent variables which were selected to assess the potential effect of sociodemographic conditions focus on similar features to those dealt with in the previous analysis: self-identifying as a woman or man, age (in this case, 30 years or under) and level of education (less than lower secondary education or lower secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education or tertiary education completed). However, self-identification with a particular socioeconomic category is not recorded in the ESS. To assess the potential effect of social background two proxy variables were mobilized here: being unemployed and a low monthly income. Broadly speaking, the literature demonstrates that household income tends to be highly influential in shaping citizens' modalities of political participation (Cicatiello, Ercolano and Gaeta, 2015). In the US case, scholars have shown that in areas characterised by deeper income inequality, citizens declare lower levels of voting (Solt, 2010; Wong, Wong, 2022). From an individual perspective, citizens with higher incomes tend to express higher commitment to civic participation (Levin-Waldman, 2013). Concerning the effect of unemployment, its prevalence at the subnational level seems to provoke (paradoxically) higher levels of electoral turnout at the subnational level in Europe (Azzollini, 2021). From an individual viewpoint, the influence of unemployment on the probability to abstain tends to be stronger for the youngest generations (Azzollini, 2023; Österman, Brännlund, 2024).



Table 3-2 Individual sociodemographic characteristics and participation in legal public demonstrations (European Social Survey: 2023)

Participation in legal public demonstration												
Low Educ. Level	-	*										
	0.016	*										
	0.001											
High Educ. Level			-	*								
			0.016	*								
			0.001									
Man					-							
					0.000							
					0.000							
Woman						0.000						
						0.000						
Young							-	*				
							0.014	*				
							0.002					
Low income									0.001			
									0.001			
Unemployed										-		
										0.002		
										0.001		
Intercept	0.016	*	0.016	*	0.014	*	0.014	*	0.014	*	0.014	*
	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Number of observations	31306		31306		31306		31306		31306		31306	
	1		1		1		1		1		1	

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

Table 3-3 Individual sociodemographic characteristics and participation in unlawful public demonstrations (European Social Survey: 2023)

Participation in unlawful public demonstration											
Low Educ. Level	-	*									
	0.016	*									
	0.001										
High Educ. Level				*							
			0.051	*							
			0.001								
Man										*	
					0.009	*					
					0.001						
Woman							-	*			
							0.009	*			
							0.001				
Young									*		
							0.031	*			
							0.003				
Low income									-	*	
									0.009	*	
									0.001		
Unemployed											*
										0.018	*



		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0.002	*	
Intercept	0.062	*	0.054	*	0.055	*	0.064	*	0.059	*	0.060	*
	0.000		0.000		0.001		0.001		0.000		0.000	0.000
Number of observatio ns	31306		31306		31306		31306		31306		31306	31306
	1		1		1		1		1		1	1

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

Concerning participation in *legal public demonstrations*, none of the tested sociodemographic factors seem to increase the probability of being involved in this kind of political activity. However, three factors contribute to decrease the probability of participation: being aged below 30 years old, and low and high levels of education. This trend, which echoes the finding for voting, further supports the argument of political withdrawal across the board. The negative influence of being aged below 30 years old is surprising given the general framing of ecologist, feminist and antiracist demonstrations in Europe as populated by younger citizens and their willingness to engage in *legal public demonstrations* (Rodriguez-Newhall, 2020; Lorenzini, Monsch, Rosset, 2021; Sloam, Pickard, Henn, 2022). This age feature may point to growing political scepticism in the youngest generations, fed by a more distant relationship with political and state institutions. Or it may be that political distrust plays a significant role in shaping protest behaviour potentially shifting toward *unlawful public demonstrations*, as we discuss in the following section.

As far as the self-declared participation in *unlawful public demonstrations* is concerned, the following sociodemographic features tend to increase the probability of having been involved in such actions: being male, having a high level of education and being unemployed. This influence of the gender can be interpreted as a consequence of the predominance, during protest movements, of conflictual behaviours traditionally associated with manhood and masculinity – while women, even in radical organisations, are traditionally not pushed to participate in these types of actions (Boumaza, 2002; Calabrese, 2016; Bahadir Türk, 2020). The positive effect of a high level of education constitutes additional evidence of the potential existence of a specific profile of “critical citizen”, reluctant to participate in institutionalised political procedures, but more inclined to get involved in protest actions. Lastly, the positive influence of unemployment on participation in unlawful public demonstrations could be explained by deepening social tensions since the 2008 economic crisis, as well as the lack of organisations able to politicise – and frame – the social and political claims expressed by social categories experiencing the new forms of economic precariousness (Voutyras, 2016; Bone, 2021; Apostolidis, 2021).

Conversely, several sociodemographic factors tend to decrease the probability of having participated in *unlawful public demonstrations*. Identifying as female clearly weakens this potential, which can be easily explained by the previously mentioned predominance of masculine norms in protest movements. Having a low level of education also decreases the probability of having participated in unlawful public demonstrations. Besides, two other elements weaken the probability to have been involved in such actions: being young, and a low monthly income.



Table 3-4 Individual sociodemographic characteristics and boycott (European Social Survey: 2023)

Participation in boycotts										
Low Educ. Level		*								
	-0.132	*								
	0.002									
High Educ. Level			*							
			0.081	*						
			0.002							
Man				-	*					
				0.010	*					
				0.001						
Woman						*				
						0.010	*			
						0.001				
Young								-	*	
								0.057	*	
								0.005		
Low income									-	*
									0.040	*
									0.002	
Unemployed										-
										0.028
										0.004
Intercept	0.223	*	0.197	*	0.210	*	0.200	*	0.206	*
	0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001	
Number of observations	31306		31306		31306		31306		31306	
	1		1		1		1		1	

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

Lastly, recourse to boycott seems to be fed by two determining sociodemographic factors: self-identifying as a woman, and benefitting from a high level of education. This influence of gender (Acik, 2013; Koos, 2012; Neilson and Paxton 2010; Sandovici and Davis, 2010) can be interpreted as a consequence of the traditional assignment of women to consumption work for their families, according to patriarchal and heteronormative norms still prevalent in society. Consequently, if women tend to be assigned to this role in their family lives, politicising their consumption habits could be a way to assert themselves in their citizenship. As far as the high level of education is concerned, this politicisation of consumption habits can be interpreted as an additional manifestation of the social awareness expressed by critical citizens (Boulianne, 2022), who are more inclined to establish relationships between their choices of consumption habits and their ideological and political preferences (Lorenzini and Bassoli, 2015). Conversely, and coherently with the previously identified trends and possible explanations, self-identifying as a man and having a low level of education both decrease the probability of boycotting. The same trend can be highlighted for young individuals, as well as for people being unemployed and suffering from a low income. These two last results could be interpreted as a consequence of economic precariousness: making specific consumption choices is more difficult for individuals who are financially constrained – and could be even less possible if these choices are hypothetically motivated by political or ethical values.



3.3 What are the effects of political distrust?

The previous section focused on the links between different socio-demographic variables and the likelihood of participation in a range of different action types. It underlined that older and higher social class respondents were more likely to have voted in the previous national elections, with the opposite generally true for not voting, though with caveats about the effects of being legally allowed to vote. As for participating in legal demonstrations, respondents below the age of 30 and of high or low education levels were less likely to protest: this surprising result points to the use of looking at the role of political distrust as a potential factor in young peoples' protests. The analysis also pointed to a heavily gendered divide in participation in unlawful protests and in boycotting, with respondents self-identifying as male much more likely to engage in the former, and female identifiers in the latter. A similar pattern also emerged around economic indicators: unemployed respondents were more likely to engage in unlawful demonstrations, while unemployment and low income decreased the likelihood of boycotting. These findings pointed to the relevance of growing economic divides in patterns of political participation.

In this section the focus is on the role of political distrust in shaping these patterns of political participation among different socio-economic groups. This focus follows reasoning in the literature on participation that find a strong role for political distrust in moving away from more institutionalised or conventional types of political participation and moving towards more contentious forms of political participation (see the literature review in chapter 2). We follow the same analytical strategy as section 5.2, beginning once more with participation in the last national election.



Table 3-5 Political distrust, individual sociodemographic characteristics and vote in last national election (Standard Eurobarometer: 2011-2023)

	Voted in last national election															
Low Educ. Level	-0.008	**														
	0.001															
Distrust	-0.025	**	-0.025	**	-0.026	**	-0.026	**	-0.026	**	-0.026	**	-0.026	**	-0.026	**
	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
University graduate			-0.009	**												
			0.001													
Young					-0.012	**										
					0.001											
Old							0.013	**								
							0.000									
Man									0.002	**						
									0.000							
Woman											0.002	**				
											0.000					
Working/Lower Middle Class													-0.008	**		
													0.000			



Higher/Upper Middle Class														0.010	**	
														0.001		
Intercept	0.026	**	0.026	**	0.027	**	0.021	**	0.025	**	0.024	**	0.029	**	0.025	**
	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Number of observations	848246		848246		848246		848246		848246		848246		848246		848246	

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



The analysis shows that including political distrust (or more precisely low levels of political trust) does not change the overall pattern previously underlined: older respondents and individuals who place themselves in the higher or upper middle class remain more likely to have voted, while younger respondents and those placing themselves in the working or lower middle class, of all educational levels, are less likely to have voted. Distrust does appear to magnify the pattern however: those who indicate political distrust are generally less likely to have voted in the last national elections. This supports the general view in the literature (Grönlund, Setälä, and Herne, 2007; Tiberj and Haute, 2022) about the role of political trust in driving down conventional political participation: among those groups that appear as less likely to vote, political distrust increases this probability.

Table 3-6 Distrust, individual sociodemographic characteristics, and participation in legal public demonstrations

Participation in legal public demonstrations														
Low Ed.	-0.016	*												
	0.001	*												
Dis-trust	0.001	*	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	
	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
High Ed.			-0.016	*										
			0.001	*										
Man					-									
					0.000									
					0.000									
Wo-man							0.000							
							0.000							
You-ng									-0.014	*				
									0.002	*				
Low inco- me										0.001				
										0.001				
Un-emp.												-0.002		
												0.001		
Inter-cept	0.016	*	0.015	*	0.014	*	0.013	*	0.014	*	0.014	*	0.014	*
	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	



Number of observations	31306	31306	31306	31306	31306	31306	31306	31306
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

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

Table 3-7 Distrust, individual sociodemographic characteristics and participation in unlawful public demonstrations

Participation in legal public demonstrations														
Low Ed.	-0.016	**												
	0.001													
Distrust	0.008	**	0.009	**	0.008	**	0.008	**	0.008	**	0.008	**	0.008	**
	0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001	
High Ed.			0.051	**										
			0.001											
Man					0.009	**								
					0.001									
Woman							-0.009	**						
							0.001							
Young									0.032	**				
									0.003					
Low income											-0.009	**		
											0.001			
Unemployed													0.018	**
													0.002	
Intercep.	0.056	**	0.048	**	0.050	**	0.059	**	0.053	**	0.055	**	0.053	**
	0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001	
Nb. of obs.	313061		313061		313061		313061		313061		313061		313061	

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

Considering the probability of participating in demonstrations, both lawful and unlawful, similar findings apply. For *legal public demonstrations*, the pattern identified where younger respondents below the age of 30 and of all education levels are less likely to take part, political distrust has only a slightly significant effect, but in an unexpected direction. Distrust (or low levels of political trust,



as it is constructed in this survey) lowers the probability of taking part in a legal public demonstration. This may suggest that rather than low political trust driving a change in types of political participation from conventional and institutionalised to more contentious forms it instead drives disengagement. However, the analysis of the role of distrust in participation in *unlawful demonstrations* suggests that the effects of low political trust are indeed working in the expected direction. If we consider that legal demonstrations have come to be understood as more conventional, modular and familiar forms of normal political participation (e.g. Tilly, 1978), then the role of political distrust in driving a move to contentious participation forms may be more visible in the analysis regarding unlawful demonstrations. This does indeed appear to be the case, but in two directions. Low levels of political trust magnify both findings about the likelihood of taking part or not in unlawful demonstrations. Thus, political distrust appears as one driver of contentious participation for unemployed, highly educated citizens and men in particular. This points once more to a particular type of critical citizen. It is also worth noting that in many European countries, measures have been passed to define previously lawful demonstrations as unlawful, particularly forms used by climate and social justice groups (Gordon, 2024). When considering how trends in political participation choices are shaped by political trust levels, it is important to also reflect on how changing definitions of lawful participation may have knock on effects on political trust since trust is a significant driver in those choices.

Table 3-8 Distrust, individual sociodemographic characteristics and boycott

	Participating in a boycott							
Low Educ.	-0.132	*						
	0.002							
Distrust	-0.001	-0.001	-0.002	-0.002	-0.003	-0.001	-0.002	
	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	
High Educ.		0.081	*					
		0.002						
Man			-0.010	*				
			0.001					
Woman					0.010	*		
					0.001			
Young						-0.057	*	
						0.005		
Low income							-	*
							0.040	*
							0.002	



political trust levels in this view. They should also engage in programmes to address low political trust among younger generations, where distrust seems to be linking to political disengagement from various types of political participation.

4 Political and Activist Affiliations, Trust, and Participation

Louisa Parks

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4.1 Introduction

In this section we draw on the web-scraped data from X to explore how political and activist affiliations are linked to different participation choices, and how trust interacts to shape this link as described in Task 3.7. In deliverable 3.3 of the ActEU project, which focused on the relationships between trust and participation types, we analysed the web-scraped data from X drawing on the machine annotations of the whole dataset. We focused in particular on the policy areas of immigration and climate change. In the area of climate change this general approach revealed some evidence of X being biased towards climate sceptic content rooted in political distrust which tended to be linked to participation in political parties. Pro-climate action content rooted in trust was linked with a broad range of political participation types. While these findings challenged the picture of political participation on matters of climate change based on survey data, they matched the literature on trust and participation in polarised debates. Regarding the policy field of immigration, the annotated data on X suggest there is no clear link between polarisation in debates on this topic, trust, and higher acceptability and participation in contentious forms of participation such as protest.

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Given these mixed findings, the breadth and the amount of web-scraped data available, and the need to further test the reliability of the annotations, the strategy followed in this section is intended to explore the X data in more detail using a smaller-scale approach to zoom in on a more precise sample. The strategy to identify content with more targeted information on political and activist affiliations was to seek to extract calls for action of different types within the data. A focus on calls for action allows us to look at the 'demand' side of participation and be more confident about our data pointing to findings on the links between types of political and activist actors and types of participation, as well as about the role of trust in that relationship. In addition, this approach also allows us a glimpse at the 'supply' side of affiliations, trust, and participation by exploring the responses to these calls for action.

To operationalise this strategy we proceeded as follows. First, we identified a list of participation types of interest within the ActEU project, drawing on the conceptualisation moving from less contentious or conventional participation towards more contentious or unconventional participation. The list also seeks to comprise recent forms of contentious political participation.

Our list is as follows:

1. Voting/Electing
2. Petitioning
3. Donating
4. Contacting politicians or institutions



5. Attending meetings or events
6. Boycotting
7. Buycotting
8. Marching/protesting
9. Striking
10. Occupying/camping/sit-ins
11. Flash mobs/Die-ins
12. Blocking/Barricading

We then prepared a list of keywords and phrases associated with these action types and used these to retrieve a limited sample of about 50 tweets each in German, Italian, French, and English from the web-scraped data. Here, we specifically focused on seed accounts of activists, interest groups, political parties, politicians, trades union, and unionists. We then manually coded the clearest examples of calls for action that matched out different types of interest within this smaller sample. These selected examples then formed the basis to train a machine learning model to retrieve a relatively accurate sample of calls for action. This model yielded a sample of 1189 tweets. Where these tweets did not correspond clearly to the keywords for different types of participation they were marked 'off-topic'. After manually checking the off-topic examples and adding these to tweets connected to one of our participation types, we were able to identify 263 calls for action tweeted by both activist and political accounts and by common users. We then extracted the responses to these calls for action, which yielded 97 examples. Although this data set is limited it is clearly targeted to the central focus of the task, and reveals some interesting findings, namely that political trust seems to play little role in shaping the political participation of actors on the 'demand' side (i.e. those who ask for citizens to participate). Based on our admittedly small dataset, on the 'supply' side of participation (responses to calls for action) we find that political distrust did play a role in breaking the links suggested by established literature about trust and different forms of conventional participation. This suggests that programmes addressing political distrust may be well placed to address falling conventional political participation in the EU.

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4.2 Political and activist actors, forms of participation, and trust

4.2.1 Data distribution and tentative findings

A first way of delving into the question of political and activist affiliations and their links to different forms of participation is by providing a more detailed description of the data distribution by language, actor type and participation or action types.



Table 4-1 Distribution of calls for action by language (Max-Valentin Robert)

language	CFA_label					Total
	Attendi..	Contact..	Petitio..	Striking	Voting/..	
cs	2	1	0	0	20	23
da	6	0	0	0	9	15
de	12	4	1	0	29	46
es	5	0	0	0	9	14
fi	14	7	0	0	18	39
fr	5	9	3	6	62	85
it	2	0	1	0	1	4
pl	9	9	1	0	18	37
Total	55	30	6	6	166	263

Table 4-2 Distribution by actor types (Max-Valentin Robert)

actor type	CFA_label					Total
	Attendi..	Contact..	Petitio..	Striking	Voting/..	
activist	0	0	1	0	0	1
common user	28	22	3	0	117	170
government	4	2	0	1	3	10
interest group	2	0	0	0	0	2
news	4	3	0	4	3	14
political party	2	2	1	0	7	12
politician	13	1	1	1	36	52
union	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total	55	30	6	6	166	263

Table 4-3 Distribution of types of participation/action (Max-Valentin Robert)

CFA_label	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Attending Meetings or Events	55	20.91	20.91
Contacting Politicians or Institutions	30	11.41	32.32
Petitioning	6	2.28	34.60
Striking	6	2.28	36.88
Voting/Electing	166	63.12	100.00
Total	263	100.00	



CFA_label	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Attending Meetings or Events	55	20.91	20.91
Contacting Politicians or Institutions	30	11.41	32.32
Petitioning	6	2.28	34.60
Striking	6	2.28	36.88
Voting/Electing	166	63.12	100.00
Total	263	100.00	

The calls for action are well distributed among the different languages, with the exception of Italian and Greek which were not picked up. The findings should therefore be understood as applying to those countries where the other languages of calls for action are spoken. In addition, tweets in French are over-represented in the sample. Regarding the distribution of actor types, activists, trades union, and interest groups are conspicuous by their absence, which appears to be connected to the distribution of the action types: none of the more contentious forms of participation from our list appear in the sample with the exception of 6 calls for strikes.

There is a twofold explanation that potentially explains these characteristics in our data. First, in our initial coding of calls for action used to train the machine extraction of the broader dataset we did not find many examples of the more contentious action forms. This means that there was little to train the extraction for these types of action, which could explain this lack. Nevertheless, the fact that there were few examples of this type of action in the initial coding sample still suggests they may be rare. Here the most likely explanation is simply that calls for more contentious actions are not shared on X. Whether this is a more recent phenomenon linked to the ownership change and subsequent changes of policy on the platform, or whether this is a more longstanding trend requires further research. However, the declining numbers of X account holders in recent times appears to indicate the former. In terms of the relationship between activist affiliations and contentious forms of action and participation, the fact that both contentious *forms* of action and activist and trade union *actors* are missing is strong indication that it is these actors and actions that are linked. This is unsurprising and in line with longstanding literature on contentious politics and its actors (e.g. della Porta and Diani, 2020). Yet activists and trades union do not engage only in these types of actions – they also engage in less contentious forms. One reading of the shape of our data could then be as indicating a tighter link between activist and union affiliations and contentious actions, since these actors are not sharing calls for less contentious action. Another reading is, as mentioned, that these groups have simply left this platform. A similar argument concerns interest groups, which are also conspicuous by their absence in the sample. Again, the absence of interest groups could also point to a tighter link with more contentious action forms. As interest groups tend to be associated more often with less contentious actions including petitioning, contacting politicians or institutions, and holding meetings and events, this is a potentially very interesting finding. Or, once more, it could simply indicate that these groups too have left the platform.

4.2.2 Political and activist affiliations, types of action and trust in calls for action

To move beyond findings and limitations suggested by the shape of our dataset, we then explored the links between the different affiliations and calls for different types of action and participation.

Given the small size of our dataset, we investigated based on groupings. In the tables below political actors includes politicians, political parties, and activists, which we understand as the more political



sources of 'demand' for participation. Under the title interest groups we include both interest groups (such as NGOs and think tanks) and trades union and unionists. Finally, we found various calls for action emanating from media accounts and created a separate group to investigate these.

Table 4-4 Political actors and calls for actions (Max-Valentin Robert)

	Participation in meetings or events	Contacting politicians and institutions	Voting and electing
Political actors	0.063 (0.017)	** 0.001 (0.012)	** 0.121 (0.027)
Intercept	0.036 (0.007)	** 0.025 (0.005)	** 0.120 (0.011)
Number of observations	1189	1189	1189

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

Table 4-5 Interest groups and calls for actions (Max-Valentin Robert)

	Participation in meetings or events	Contacting politicians and institutions	Voting or electing
Interest groups	0.156 (0.047)	** -0.026 (0.035)	-0.142 (0.078)
Intercept	0.044 (0.006)	** 0.026 (0.005)	** 0.142 (0.010)
Number of observations	1189	1189	1189

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

Table 4-6 Media and calls for actions (Max-Valentin Robert)

	Participating in meeting or events	Contacting politicians and institutions	Voting or electing
Media	0.009 (0.025)	0.017 (0.019)	-0.105 (0.042)
Intercept	0.046 (0.006)	** 0.024 (0.005)	** 0.146 (0.010)



Number of observations | 1189 | 1189 | 1189

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

This first investigation of the data reveals that being classified as a political actor clearly raises the probability of publishing a call to participate in meetings or events and for voting or electing, but not for contacting politicians or institutions. The fact that the dates of the webscraping corresponded to run-ups to European elections is likely to be an explanatory factor here, yet the relative absence of activist actors is also a clear explanation. It is these 'outside' political actors that are more likely to call for adherents to contact politicians and institutions to express their position or call for a response (della Porta and Diani, 2020). Regarding interest groups, including trades union, the data suggest there is no significant link between these groups and calls to contact politicians or institutions, nor to engage in voting. It does, however, raise the probability of publishing a call to participate in meetings or events, again corresponding with the literature on the action forms most commonly followed by these actors. Media accounts, finally, are slightly associated with calls for voting and electing, but not the other forms of participation present in the sample. This points towards a view of media being specifically involved in 'getting out the vote' around election times.

We then proceeded to investigate how political trust and distrust shaped these findings concerning the links between affiliations and participation forms.

Table 4-7 Political actors, (dis)trust and calls for actions (Max-Valentin Robert)

	Participation in meetings or events	Contacting politicians or institutions	Voting or electing
Political actors	0.060**	0.003	0.109**
	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.027)
Trust	0.037	-0.027	0.132*
	(0.034)	(0.026)	(0.056)
Distrust	-0.028	0.001	-0.062
	(0.025)	(0.019)	(0.041)
Intercept	0.037**	0.026**	0.122**
	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.011)
Number of observations	1189	1189	1189

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



Table 4-8 Interest groups, (dis)trust and calls for actions (Max-Valentin Robert)

	Participating in meetings or events	Contacting politicians or institutions	Voting or electing
Interest groups	0.157** (0.047)	-0.025 (0.035)	-0.142 (0.078)
Trust	0.052 (0.034)	-0.026 (0.025)	0.163** (0.056)
Distrust	-0.035 (0.025)	0.001 (0.019)	-0.071 (0.041)
Intercept	0.044** (0.006)	0.026 (0.005)	0.141** (0.011)
Number of observations	1189	1189	1189

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

Table 4-9 Media, (dis)trust and calls for actions (Max-Valentin Robert)

	Participating in meetings or events	Contacting politicians or institutions	Voting or electing
Media	0.009 (0.025)	0.016 (0.019)	-0.105* (0.042)
Trust	0.054 (0.034)	-0.025 (0.025)	0.154** (0.056)
Distrust	-0.033 (0.025)	0.002 (0.019)	-0.079 (0.041)
Intercept	0.046** (0.007)	0.025 (0.005)	0.146** (0.011)
Number of observations	1189	1189	1189

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

Regarding political actors, we do not find any role of either political trust or political distrust in shaping the links described between this type of actor and calls to participated in meetings and events and to vote or engage in other electoral activities. The same holds for interest groups, who remain linked to calls to participated in meetings or events, and to media accounts, where remain slightly associated with calls for voting/electing. There does not appear to be any significant role for political trust or distrust for these actors' calls for action where these less contentious and more



conventional forms are concerned. This is not particularly surprising on the basis of longstanding literature, and indicates that even under difficult political times and polarised debates these links endure. Again, more contentious activist accounts are not fully represented in our exploratory sample. Given this, we move in the next section to investigate the interlinkages between affiliations, participation types and political trust by examining responses to these calls for action.

4.2.3 Political and activist affiliations, types of action and trust in responses to calls for action

To dive deeper into how trust interacts with support for different types of action on the basis of activist or political affiliations, we focus on the responses to the calls for action we identified that were annotated for political trust or distrust. Our reasoning is that given that most of these responses are linked to retweeting these calls for action, they are indicative of support for these. The significance of these findings is somewhat limited, as only 98 responses matched these criteria. Nevertheless, analysing these responses does provide some further insights.

Table 4-10 Trustful political actors and participation by contacting politicians and institutions (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Contacting political_actor##pol_trust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	.034166271	3	.011388757	F(3, 1185)	=	0.46
Residual	29.2088951	1,185	.024648857	Prob > F	=	0.7088
Total	29.2430614	1,188	.024615372	R-squared	=	0.0012
				Adj R-squared	=	-0.0014
				Root MSE	=	.157

Contacting	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.political_actor	-.0076552	.0135952	-0.56	0.573	-.0343286	.0190182
1.pol_trust	-.0271357	.0331129	-0.82	0.413	-.0921021	.0378307
political_actor#pol_trust						
1 1	.0076552	.0520236	0.15	0.883	-.0944134	.1097237
_cons	.0271357	.0049772	5.45	0.000	.0173705	.0369008



Table 4-11 Trustful political actors and electoral participation (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Voting_Electing political_actor##pol_trust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	3.71608786	3	1.23869595	F(3, 1185)	=	10.55
Residual	139.108134	1,185	.117390831	Prob > F	=	0.0000
Total	142.824222	1,188	.120222409	R-squared	=	0.0260
				Adj R-squared	=	0.0236
				Root MSE	=	.34262

Voting_Electing	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.political_actor	.1376689	.0296692	4.64	0.000	.0794589	.1958788
1.pol_trust	.2322482	.0722629	3.21	0.001	.0904707	.3740257
political_actor#pol_trust						
1 1	-.2502008	.1135322	-2.20	0.028	-.4729473	-.0274544
_cons	.1155779	.0108619	10.64	0.000	.0942672	.1368886

Table 4-12 Trustful political actors and participation in meetings or events (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Meeting_Events political_actor##pol_trust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	.492443425	3	.164147808	F(3, 1185)	=	3.74
Residual	51.9634018	1,185	.043850972	Prob > F	=	0.0108
Total	52.4558452	1,188	.044154752	R-squared	=	0.0094
				Adj R-squared	=	0.0069
				Root MSE	=	.20941

Meeting_Events	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.political_actor	.0387261	.0181333	2.14	0.033	.0031491	.0743031
1.pol_trust	.0042823	.044166	0.10	0.923	-.08237	.0909346
political_actor#pol_trust						
1 1	.0942662	.0693891	1.36	0.175	-.041873	.2304055
_cons	.039196	.0066386	5.90	0.000	.0261712	.0522207

To find broader patterns in the data we grouped together the political actors' responses to the calls for action to cover politicians, political parties, and activists which we understand as more political sources of 'demand' for participation. We then explored how trust annotations for these responses interacted in the relationship between being a political actor and supporting for a call for action. As shown above, we find that responses to calls for action by political actors are positively associated with calls for (1) participating in meetings or events and (2) voting and electing, independently of political distrust. Tweets annotated for trustful content were also positively



associated with calls for voting and electing. In this case, activists formed a very small part of the data and their behaviour is not reflected in the findings.

Table 4-13 Distrustful political actors and participation by contacting politicians and institutions (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Contacting_political_actor##pol_distrust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	.013448446	3	.004482815	F(3, 1185)	=	0.18
Residual	29.229613	1,185	.02466634	Prob > F	=	0.9088
				R-squared	=	0.0005
				Adj R-squared	=	-0.0021
Total	29.2430614	1,188	.024615372	Root MSE	=	.15706

Contacting	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.political_actor	-.0083827	.0132172	-0.63	0.526	-.0343145	.017549
1.pol_distrust	.0009422	.0190787	0.05	0.961	-.0364896	.038374
political_actor#pol_distrust						
1 1	-.0190145	.0737961	-0.26	0.797	-.1638	.125771
_cons	.026455	.005109	5.18	0.000	.0164313	.0364787

Table 4-14 Distrustful political actors and electoral participation (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Voting_Electing_political_actor##pol_distrust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	3.03963354	3	1.01321118	F(3, 1185)	=	8.59
Residual	139.784588	1,185	.117961678	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.0213
				Adj R-squared	=	0.0188
Total	142.824222	1,188	.120222409	Root MSE	=	.34346

Voting_Electing	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.political_actor	.1341684	.028904	4.64	0.000	.0774598	.1908771
1.pol_distrust	-.0563746	.0417222	-1.35	0.177	-.1382322	.025483
political_actor#pol_distrust						
1 1	-.2026616	.1613806	-1.26	0.209	-.5192851	.1139619
_cons	.1248677	.0111726	11.18	0.000	.1029474	.146788



Table 4-15 Distrustful political actors and participation in meetings or events (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Meeting_Events political_actor##pol_distrust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	.434489375	3	.144829792	F(3, 1185)	=	3.30
Residual	52.0213559	1,185	.043899878	Prob > F	=	0.0198
Total	52.4558452	1,188	.044154752	R-squared	=	0.0083
				Adj R-squared	=	0.0058
				Root MSE	=	.20952

Meeting_Events	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.political_actor	.0490916	.0176327	2.78	0.005	.0144968	.0836864
1.pol_distrust	-.0275712	.0254524	-1.08	0.279	-.0775079	.0223655
political_actor#pol_distrust						
1 1	-.0627902	.0984493	-0.64	0.524	-.2559445	.130364
_cons	.0412698	.0068158	6.06	0.000	.0278975	.0546422

Where political actors' responses to calls for action had been annotated for distrust, the positive association with participating in meetings or events remains, but there is no significant association with calls for contacting politicians or institutions, nor with voting and electing.

The role of trust for political actors thus seems to be one of broadening their decisions to support a range of non-contentious participation types. Distrust instead narrows this range, and most importantly the findings point to a move away from calls to vote and elect, and to engage with politicians and institutions.



Table 4-16 Trustful interest groups and participation by contacting politicians and institutions (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Contacting interest_group##pol_trust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	.039521573	3	.013173858	F(3, 1185)	=	0.53
Residual	29.2035398	1,185	.024644337	Prob > F	=	0.6586
Total	29.2430614	1,188	.024615372	R-squared	=	0.0014
				Adj R-squared	=	-0.0012
				Root MSE	=	.15699

Contacting	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.interest_group	-.0265487	.0363164	-0.73	0.465	-.0978002	.0447029
1.pol_trust	-.0265487	.0255679	-1.04	0.299	-.076712	.0236146
interest_group#pol_trust						
1 1	.0265487	.1630801	0.16	0.871	-.2934093	.3465066
_cons	.0265487	.00467	5.68	0.000	.0173862	.0357111

Table 4-17 Trustful interest groups and electoral participation (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Voting_Electing interest_group##pol_trust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	1.50414035	3	.501380116	F(3, 1185)	=	4.20
Residual	141.320082	1,185	.119257453	Prob > F	=	0.0057
Total	142.824222	1,188	.120222409	R-squared	=	0.0105
				Adj R-squared	=	0.0080
				Root MSE	=	.34534

Voting_Electing	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.interest_group	-.1362832	.079889	-1.71	0.088	-.2930228	.0204564
1.pol_trust	.1714091	.0562443	3.05	0.002	.0610596	.2817586
interest_group#pol_trust						
1 1	-.1714091	.3587445	-0.48	0.633	-.8752542	.532436
_cons	.1362832	.0102731	13.27	0.000	.1161276	.1564388



Table 4-0-18 Trustful interest groups and participation in meetings or events (Max-Valentin Robert)

```
. reg Meeting_Events interest_group##pol_trust
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	1,189
Model	1.19923674	3	.399745581	F(3, 1185)	=	9.24
Residual	51.2566085	1,185	.043254522	Prob > F	=	0.0000
Total	52.4558452	1,188	.044154752	R-squared	=	0.0229
				Adj R-squared	=	0.0204
				Root MSE	=	.20798

Meeting_Events	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
1.interest_group	.1154169	.0481127	2.40	0.017	.0210213	.2098124
1.pol_trust	.0344452	.0338728	1.02	0.309	-.0320122	.1009026
interest_group#pol_trust						
1 1	.8076601	.2160519	3.74	0.000	.3837731	1.231547
_cons	.0424779	.0061869	6.87	0.000	.0303393	.0546165

Regarding other types of actors, here we gathered interest groups and trades union. However, further responses to calls for action only concerned interest groups. As above, we explored how trust annotations for these responses interacted in the relationship between being an interest group and supporting for a call for action.

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Overall, we find that responses to calls for action from interest groups are positively associated with calls for participating in meetings or events independently from (dis)trust, but not with calls for contacting politicians and institutions nor with calls for voting and electing. When we introduce trust annotations into the relationship, we find instead responses annotated for trust are associated with calls for participating in meetings or events, but distrustful responses are not. As for distrust, distrustful tweets from interest groups are not significantly associated with calls for participating in meetings or events; nor with calls for voting and electing. For interest groups (including interest groups and trades union) it thus appears to be political trust that leads to support for participation in meetings or events, but that few other forms of conventional participation are supported. This limited link to a single form of conventional participation suggests some support for the tentative interpretation of the data regarding interest groups outlined above – i.e. that there may be evidence for a shift towards more contentious types of action that are not contained in our data.

Finally, since the number of responses to calls for is relatively small and includes a significant proportion of common users without explicit affiliations (beyond their support for a call for action), a more qualitative overview of trust and support for different forms of action is useful to point to further insights. To get an idea of the content of these responses, we used the machine translations of the original texts into English. After removing redundant text and ensuring that any identifying information had been removed, we performed intentional AI coding using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti, specifying a focus on what the text suggests about political trust and distrust.



A central theme linked to trust according to this analysis is collective action on a broad number of issues: the EU stands out, again mostly due to tweets about the European Parliament elections. This is also confirmed by codings about democracy, which point to text about candidates, nominations and the like. On definitions of trust and distrust in the text, the coding points to links between trust, integrity, political support and appreciation. Trust dynamics are also highlighted in the coding, and particularly collaboration, democracy, and support. Distrust appears as the most common coding in the text however, and is linked to scepticism and reluctance, as well as disgust (including emojis) and derogatory terms. The general proportions of texts coded for political trust and distrust, and the links between trust and voting/electing, confirm the findings of the more general investigation. In addition, the links between distrust, scepticism and reluctance shed light on the reasoning amongst more distrustful respondents about conventional participation.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we took an exploratory approach to X data. We looked for specific calls for action as a way of zooming in on the actors offering political participation to citizens to see whether there are links between political trust, actor groups, and participation forms. The calls we were able to find were limited to conventional action and actors to the exclusion of more contentious actions and activists. This suggests that more contentious actors either do not post calls for action on X, and that further research on data from other platforms contained in the ActEU dataset may be more revealing about more contentious forms of participation. Our findings thus concern the links between political actors, trust, and less contentious and conventional forms of participation.

Overall, we find little role for political trust in shaping the action forms of those actors on the 'demand' side of participation (i.e. those who ask for citizens to participate). Regarding the limited data we discuss on the 'supply' side of participation (responses to calls for action) we find that political distrust did play a role in breaking the link to different forms of conventional participation. In more detail, our data suggest find links between political affiliations and participation that mirror existing knowledge: political actors comprising politicians and parties are more likely to call for voting/electing and participation in meetings or events. Interest groups and unions are more likely to call for action in the form of contacting politicians and institutions. Media actors also appeared in our sample as slightly associated with calls for voting/electing, linked to the timing of the webscraping around the European elections. These links endure when annotations of trust and distrust are considered. Among respondents, these patterns are repeated, but political distrust breaks these, and this is also confirmed by a first qualitative exploration of responses to calls for action. This suggests that programmes addressing political distrust may be well placed to address falling conventional political participation in the EU.

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5 Triggers, emotions and motivations behind patterns of participation

Ruth Berkowitz, Felix von Nostitz, & Kristina Weissenbach with Matilde Ceron & Zoe Lefkofridi

5.1 Introduction

In this section we draw on the ActEU focus group data (Weissenbach and Berkowitz, 2023) and the web-scraped data from X (Gayo-Avello et al, 2024) (see below for the exploratory and sequential design) to explore which triggers, motivations and emotions are behind patterns of participation in different groups of society as described in task 3.4. We also discuss how the supply side of political participation (political organisations and actors) and their calls for action match with these emotions.



Studies of the crisis of representative democracy often highlight that this is largely a crisis of political participation. They highlight the declining and changing nature of political participation in Europe (see chapter 2 for the state of the art). 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 the role of emotions and motivations as a key trigger for political participation.

In this section we follow a broad understanding of political participation “loosely defined as citizens’ activities affecting politics” (van Deth, 2014: 351). Our understanding of political participation is based on the distinction between conventional and unconventional (which we operationalise as contentious) but goes beyond this theoretical distinction (see chapter 1 for conceptualisation and definitions). We are interested in the question under which circumstances citizens’ political participation moves to “outsider forms” beyond the institutions of representative democracy. In participation research we find that “political actions and decisions are always entwined with emotions. [...] Social identities are among the most salient factors shaping these emotions, and so they are among the primary causes of political participation” (Jasper and Zhelnina, 2022: 662). Positive emotions as well as negative ones tend to reciprocally feed individual dispositions to participate in protests, for example (Sabucedo and Vilas, 2014; Bar-Tal *et al.*, 2007).

We argue that the perceptual side of political participation matters for actual participation behaviours, and that within the perceptual dimension we find rational and emotional motivations for citizens to participate through institutions of representative democracy or not (demand side, identity characteristics, distribution of power, path dependencies, participation routines, feelings and identities: Abrajano, Leighley, and Markarian, 2020; Butzlaff 2024; Slaughter and Brown, 2022: 738, Berkowitz et al, 2024). At the same time, the supply side (e.g. participation options, access to participation, transparency and calls for participation) matter for citizens’ participatory trust in representative democracy, both individually and as groups. Empirical findings from the ActEU focus groups data (Weissenbach and Berkowitz, 2023) support the theoretical assumption that numerous rational and emotional group-specific triggers and motivations (perceptual side) matter for whether citizens pick a certain participation option (behavioural side) and have “confidence in regime institutions and approval of incumbent office-holders” (Norris, 2017: 24) – which is our definition of trust.

Given these findings, the strategy followed in this section is to combine two ActEU data sources in an exploratory and sequential design (Creswell, 2019) to account for the two dimensions of demand and supply and to investigate triggers, emotions and motivations in three distinct groups in society: a.) a group which is committed, politically interested and connected with representative democracy, b.) an average group and c.) a disconnected group. For the focus groups we screened and recruited for exactly these groups in four countries: Germany, Greece, Czechia and France. In addition, we zoom into the specific triggers, emotions and motivations in the group of women.

5.1.1 How did we screen for the three groups relevant for D3.4?

The distinct group composition of our focus groups is useful to unpack **triggers, motivations, emotions, and dynamics** in different groups in society. The group compositions were based on theoretical considerations and scientific knowledge. On the one hand it is necessary to create an environment that fosters open discussions, while on the other the specific group compositions should enable us to learn lessons that may apply for different groups in society. To create suitable conditions and facilitate open discussions in 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 the conceptual categories of attitudes and participation. Groups were also heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, and place of residence. Based on research on gender stereotypes indicating that women having less speaking time in mixed groups (Karpowitz et al, 2012; Lee and McCabe, 2021) one focus group was reserved for women in every country studied. These considerations resulted in the creation of four distinct groups per country: one group of 'disconnected' citizens characterised by political disinterest, no participation, one 'average' group with mean levels of trust in the political system, without or with little political involvement and one 'committed' group of citizens 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), as well as a women only group.

To ensure this distinct composition a screener questionnaire was used, and contained four sections: 1. Personal information related to age, gender, place of residence, education and income; 2. Questions concerning levels of political interest; 3. Questions concerning levels of political apathy or lack of interest; 4. Questions on the political participation activities of the respondents. To account for country differences, national experts in the ActEU consortium adapted the screener accordingly. These adjustments were particularly useful to consider the elections taking place in France, and different participation traditions. Therefore, we added one question to the political interest section concerning the election campaign in France, an additional question in relation to political disintegration in France and Greece and an adapted question battery for conventional political participation in Czechia. For the complete screening questionnaire see Weissenbach and Berkowitz (2023, 36-51).

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5.1.2 How did we capture emotions, motivations and triggers in the focus group discussions?

In order to capture emotions, motivations and triggers for participation in the focus group discussions a multi-stage process was employed. This process involved the contribution of expertise from our focus group task force³, which was composed of country experts and researchers from the ActEU consortium. These individuals have backgrounds in the fields of participation, representation, and attitudes, or knowledge of the countries in which the focus groups took place. This expertise enabled us to develop a guide that included different techniques to trigger conversations about the emotions and motivations related to participation. The section on participation incorporated spontaneous associations, stimuli and prompts pertaining to diverse forms of participation, as well as supporting questions where required.

The stimuli pertaining to the various forms of participation were particularly relevant in this setting. For this reason, the focus group core team undertook a preliminary test for several possible stimuli and prompts, subsequently selecting the most suitable ones. These formed the foundation upon which country experts selected appropriate stimuli for the various nations.

In order to further guarantee the standard of the guideline, another pre-test with the whole guideline was conducted. Following the testing of the guideline and the adaptation of the stimuli to all countries, the various moderators from IPSOS were briefed by country experts on the special

³ 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 Hartland, Michael Kaeding, Camille Kelbel, Jan Kovář, Petr Kratochvíl, Fredrik Malmberg, Pelin Ayan Musil, Felix von Nostitz, Louisa Parks, Ann-Kathrin Reinl, Max-Valentin Robert, Giulia Sandri, Zdeněk Sychra, Eftichia Teperoglou, Ramon Villaplana, Kristina Weissenbach



features of the guide, as well as the special features identified by the country experts. After the initial focus group discussion conducted in Germany, several minor adjustments were made. This approach ensured that all aspects deemed significant for the project were allocated sufficient attention during the focus group discussions (for complete guideline see Weissenbach and Berkowitz 2023, 7-13).

5.1.3 Method of analysis: How did we capture emotions, motivations and triggers in the codebook and hand-coding process?

To capture the emotions, motivations and triggers in the codebook and the subsequent hand-coding process we followed a second multi-stage process in which country experts and researchers from the ActEU consortium with a background in the fields of participation, representation and attitudes contributed their expertise.

In a first step, the focus group core team developed an initial coding scheme. This coding scheme draws on both theoretical considerations relating to emotions and rationalities in relation to participation⁴ and on first impressions gathered during the observation of the focus groups conducted⁵. A de-briefing with the moderators and the participants in the focus group task force allowed us to collect these observations and thus provide a better basis for the initial coding scheme. The following process of abductive hand-coding was initiated with a task force meeting at which the abduction was explained in more detail to all coders involved. Abduction (Vila-Henninger et al, 2024), understood as a means of inferencing (Peirce, 1960), is open to producing new knowledge and “consists of assembling or discovering, on the basis of an interpretation of collected data, such combinations of features for which there is no appropriate explanation or rule in the store of knowledge that already exists” (Reichertz, 2019: 264). Because there is no existing explanation “a new one must be invented or discovered by means of a mental process” (Reichertz, 2019: 264). In sum: “Abductive inferencing is, rather, an attitude towards data and towards one's own knowledge: data are to be taken seriously, and the validity of previously developed knowledge is to be questioned. It is a state of preparedness for being taken unprepared” (Reichertz, 2019: 266). For the coding process this meant that all coders were asked to be open to new codes. As soon as new codes emerged, these were communicated to all other coders and the material was coded with the new codes accordingly (see table 5.1 for the coding scheme on emotions and rationalities). Coder queries or disagreements were solved in an accompanying coder exchange meeting. By combining the expertise of political participation researchers, country experts and the abductive process of hand-coding all significant emotions and rationalities were considered (see table 5.1). This enables us to analyse the underlying emotions and triggers for participation patterns across groups in society.

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Table 5-1 Coding Scheme: Emotions and Rationalities behind participation patterns

Main Category	Subcategory and sub-subcategory	Definition / Coding rule
Rational Aspects	Time	This subcategory includes statements concerning time constraints or time restrictions. For example, in connection to building attitudes towards the political system or the politicians in the political system, the

⁴ In this step the expertise of experts on participation was particularly valuable.

⁵ Country experts and / or focus group task force members participated hidden in the different focus group discussions.



		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 effects associated with the specific form of participation.	
	Lack of fit	This subcategory includes statements concerning the evaluation of the political sphere based on the conformity with one's own 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 sphere under new social norms.	
		Reaction	This subcategory includes statements indicating that the behavior 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.	

Source: Weissenbach and Berkowitz (2023)

5.1.4 Multi-Method Approach: How did we combine focus group data with web-scraped data?

In a first step, we identified the most important emotions and rationalities related to participation depending on the specific group in the focus group data (see table 5.2-5.4). We then conducted a thematic analysis of triggers, motivations, emotions and dynamics in a more fine-grained way for the different groups. This allows us to answer the question about links between triggers, motivations and emotions behind participation choices in our three groups of disconnected, average and committed citizens. Using this technique from corpus linguistics, we focus on how our participants used terms associated with rational and emotional triggers and motivations to participate or not. In the next step of the sequential approach, we used these narrations to train the classifiers for the analysis of the web-scraped data to see whether the same semantic fields and communities appear in this source. This helps us to unpack patterns to deepen our knowledge about these links in the web-scraped data, and to investigate whether the demands, emotions and triggers of the three different groups are actually addressed by the supply side (the institutions and groups which offer participation options/call for action on X – within or outside the institutions for representative democracy).

First and foremost, the most important emotions and rationalities with corresponding connected words, phrases, and anchor samples were extracted for each group and provided to the web-



scraping team (see table 5.2-5.4). These utterances (anchor examples) were then used to retrieve German-language tweets that were semantically similar and build “semantic communities” in the text. This small dataset was then manually checked by the focus group team to see if the texts were on-topic or off-topic, and to re-allocate accordingly. German-language tweets were used based on the mother tongue of the core team. The web-scraping team then took the on-topic tweets and used each of them as a semantic query to retrieve 1000 tweets that were again semantically similar. For instance, one tweet labelled as “DISCONNECTED DISHONESTY” is used as a query, and the 1000 thousand most similar tweets to it were assigned to a “DISCONNECTED DISHONESTY” bucket. Then all these tweets were taken and checked based on semantic similarity (embeddings) to see if they were (1) close to other tweets in the on-topic list in the same category, and (2) far away from the off-topic tweets. If both conditions applied, the web-scraping team “confirmed” the label and preserved the average distance from the new example to the manually labelled examples. A sample of 1500 examples was then formed based on the closest semantic distance to the manually labelled examples, then stratified by their occurrence in the manual sample (i.e. assuming that people simply express some triggers/motivations more frequently than others on Twitter). This sample was submitted to Google's Gemini LLM with a brief request to match the labels in our taxonomy. The concrete prompt was:

“Classify the following political text based on what triggers or motivates the speaker. The speaker belongs to one of three broad groups: politically committed individuals, politically disconnected individuals, or average citizens. Assign the text to the most fitting category based on whether it reflects engagement, disengagement, or a moderate stance, *and* what underlying motivation (e.g., duty, efficacy, dissatisfaction, solidarity) is driving the statement.

Choose from the following categories: [AVERAGE EFFICACY, AVERAGE POINTLESSNESS, AVERAGE SENSE OF DUTY, AVERAGE SOLIDARITY, COMMITTED AWARENESS, COMMITTED EFFICACY, COMMITTED POLITICAL INTEREST, COMMITTED SATISFACTION, COMMITTED SENSE OF DUTY, DISCONNECTED DISHONESTY, DISCONNECTED DISINTEREST, DISCONNECTED DISSATISFACTION, DISCONNECTED DISTANCE, DISCONNECTED EFFICACY, DISCONNECTED POINTLESSNESS, DISCONNECTED SELF-INTEREST].

If the text does not fit any category, return 'OFF TOPIC'. Provide the result in JSON format with the key 'category'.

Text: '<<TEXT>>'“

If Gemini agreed with the group but not the label, the text was labelled to reflect this, for example as ‘COMMITTED OTHER’, if Gemini agreed with the group and the label, the label was confirmed (e.g. ‘COMMITTED EFFICACY’).

In a next step, the web-scraping team extracted another round of tweets, which were again manually checked by the focus group core team to see if the texts were on-topic or off-topic and re-allocate accordingly. As the focus groups were conducted in the Czech Republic (cs), Germany (de), Greece (el) and France (fr), we decided to perform a search for tweets from these countries as well. The manually labelled tweets were machine translated into these languages. Two supervised classifiers were trained: one for the groups (average, engaged, disengaged) and one for the group plus trigger/motivation in de, cs, el, fr. The classifier had a precision of 70%. Subsequently, all tweets published by the seed accounts in the designated languages were extracted. Then, all replies/quotes by common users to these tweets, again in de, cs, el and fr, were extracted. The decision was to focus on these rather than mentions and retweets because this way we have the text of the key actor (which in our understanding is the supply side of participation), plus the text of the common user (the demand side of participation) interacting with the text of the key actor. The application of the classifiers to this second list of texts enabled the assignment of each text to a tentative group and a tentative trigger.



Subsequently, all tweets by the seed accounts⁶, along with all replies and quotations by common users directed towards these tweets, were extracted to concentrate on the supply side. The tweets were categorised according to different calls for action, or where they contained no call were classified as off-topic. The dataset under consideration thus includes tweets from the designated seed accounts, their subsequent allocation to a particular call for action or off-topic category, and the subsequent allocation of reactions to those tweets to designated groups and emotions⁷. Only users interacting at least 10 times with seed account tweets are assigned to groups (see table 5.5 for a screenshot of an example of the dataset).

Table 5-2 Semantic fields in the Committed Group: Emotional and rational motivations and triggers for different participation options

Code	Connected Words	Connected phrases	Anchor examples
Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence Change Changing Happen Happening Effective Effectiveness Solve Solving Solve problems Power Success Successful Impact Attention Result Outcome Significance Action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making a difference Make a difference Have an effect Bring about chance Have an influence Have an impact Be effective Achieve results Lead to action Shape outcomes Drive change Meaningful action Cause a shift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For me, yes, those actions are few, the seriousness of the problem is much greater. Now we are talking about pensions, whether they will be 1000 CZK higher or lower, it seems to me out of place, when the future of our children and maybe ourselves depends on it, it is not addressed. Such a demonstration is not enough for us. The direct actions that Greenpeace are taking have a big media reach, those are effective. Purely in elections we won't solve it, except for the "Zeleni" party, they don't have an agenda otherwise, if Greenpeace don't block ships or demonstrate on the highway they will be heard. Demonstrations are meaningful, it's the impact of the politicians' actions, it's the expression of many tens of thousands of people, I'm not going to comment on who's speaking there, but it certainly has that impact, if politicians perceive it, they should listen to all the voices and act accordingly, that's what parliament is there for, to act and to regulate. But the demonstration is important. The impact depends on how one listens. I'm slightly dubious about what real impact they have In certain cases they may change. If the demonstration is massive. GE_C_M1: I was at many demonstrations - on the subject of the Ukraine war. To show solidarity. In the end, nothing really happens. We've forgotten that our elders did worse things than us and they managed to achieve things. GE_C_M2: Maybe just as an addition: The argument that comes up "My vote doesn't count anyway". I think you can see from the 5% hurdle that in some cases it really depends on very few votes whether a party makes it or not. Like the FDP - in the end it depends on very few votes whether this party makes it into parliament or the Landtag or not. GE_C_M3: If, for example, I had the opportunity to change something in cultural policy relatively quickly in the city district. I would have quick access. Exhibition opportunities. Fees for artists. If it is done en masse, it matters a lot.
Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling Satisfaction Conscience Fun Proud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good feeling Having fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GE_C_M2: Faith simply the thought of making a difference. Or to be involved in the right place - the right place for me, in my opinion? Very beautiful. First of all, I also do individual actions on my own. Taking advantage of Social Media as well. As I bend down and even pick up the garbage on the street (I jokingly say an example), I do what I can. And to set a good example for my children as well. I want to be a conscious citizen. Not to sit back and just blame. It makes me feel proud of myself, on an individual level. That I get up from my chair and do something. Act. Well, so that we give feedback to the politicians, whether they are doing it right or wrong, whether we are happy with them, so that we can choose who we want to

⁶ politicians/government/unions/activists/interest groups but not news media

⁷ We have the data with confidence level for the classifier being 70% and 95%



			<p>represent, even if it is just a presidential election, purely representative, so that we give our opinion and don't let someone else decide, they can only regret not going to the election.</p>
Political Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest • Opinion • Information • Informed • Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform yourself • Get all the information • All you need to know 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GE_C_M4: I was quite young - 14-15 years old - and discovered an interest in politics. And then I got involved in a major election. Because I had a strong democratic basis. Participation opportunity for me. • I think that going to the polls is extremely important, it is the first stage of civic engagement, we need to support civil society in general a little bit more, either through associations or demonstrations, for me it makes sense that each of us has a few topics that we care about and are interested in, it is not possible to cover the whole society, but activity is important and elections are a step towards that. • On YouTube you can see some speeches they have made. Even appearances on TV stations. There are some candidates you can't see, you're not 24 hours a day on TV to see what they've said. If I see that some people are catching my attention from their resumes, I will try to look up what they have said on TV or radio, if there is a quote. Or in a newspaper to decide whether this is the candidate I want to vote for or not. So for me, elections take a lot of time.
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • Aware • Awareness • Mobilize • Visible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make public • Raise awareness • Hear you • Make visible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making known one's dissatisfaction - with the status quo. And to show solidarity. And together, simply making your voice louder through the means of demonstration. • GE_C_M3: Always make yourself visible. That makes more sense than remaining invisible. • To tie in with the topic of visibility - I think they are all very important. Because visibility and attention are achieved through all of them. 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. • just want to say that certainly in this particular case it makes sense, however you demonstrate or point out that it's still an unresolved issue, there is a view in society that there is that balance. So I think we need to point to specific areas where there is not enough equality. • And me, I have two of my sons who demonstrated against the Bassines: if that hadn't happened, no one would have mentioned it.
Sense of Duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important • Duty • Right • Obligation • Responsibility • Contributing • Contribute • Engage • Support • Vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic democratic principle • Fundamental democratic principle • Personal responsibility • Right and duty • Civic responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a right and a duty. We should make voting compulsory, like in Belgium, with a penalty. Because then people come and complain, but they didn't vote. • GE_C_F2: Yes, I just want to say that I think voting is extremely important and of course it is a privilege that we can vote in Germany and that we live in a democracy and at the same time it is a duty. • I believe that it is the duty of every citizen. Beyond doubt! That we should vote. And what they tell me about abstention: "I don't vote..." I do not accept it at all! It is our obligation to participate actively in elections when they take place. It's a duty! • A right and an obligation! I agree! We try because we are disappointed with the political scene anyway, each with his own day and standards, the lesser evil. To help for the lesser of two evils for the homeland. • I need to start with myself, clean up my own mess, then it will be seen somewhere. Words are nice but you need to see the action behind it.

Own compilation (Berkowitz / Weissenbach)



Table 5-3 Semantic fields in the Average Group - Emotional and rational motivations and triggers for different participation options

Code	Connected Words	Connected phrases	Anchor examples
Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence Change Changing Happen Happening Effective Effectiveness Solve Solving Solve problems Power Success Successful Impact Attention Result Outcome Significance Action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making a difference Make a difference Have an effect Bring about chance Have an influence Have an impact Be effective Achieve results Lead to action Shape outcomes Drive change Meaningful action Cause a shift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's more effective than null voting. If we counted invalid votes, a lot of people would go out and vote. I'd vote invalid. But the only way to express yourself is to choose someone anyway. In the street it's more impactful, despite the incidents. It's still one of the places where we can make ourselves heard. Signing petitions works. I also think that shock actions have the most impact. Sitting, when it blocks everything even if the repercussions are mainly on us (for petrol, for example). Signing petitions is also good. I agree with F_A_M2, it doesn't have much influence outside the vote. And I think that if you go there and it's about things - changes to the park or something - that are not of huge global importance, I believe that you can have an influence in these areas through a personal conversation. GE_A_M2: In my opinion, the election is the thing that makes the least difference. The masses always vote for the same thing. What the minority wants goes mercilessly under the table. I also know... I'm also afraid that it doesn't help much. But still, some things are so important to me that I do it anyway. It's good for me and my feelings. But I know that it doesn't bring much. But it worked - so it really made a difference. Most of the other demos - whether they are 100% successful or not - didn't change much. It was very important! You want to see something new. To see your life getting better. Solve some of your problems. in small communities, yes, you do influence that.
Sense of Duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Important Duty Right Obligation Responsibility Contributing Contribute Engage Support Vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic democratic principle Fundamental democratic principle Personal responsibility Right and duty Civic responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GE_A_M3: Voting as such is very, very important for a basic democratic order. It is important to get to the street to support something you believe in, to protest something. I think so. In practice how easy or how often it productive is another matter. because in everyone's consciousness it is something important that... That doesn't matter. It is important to do it, it is not a waste of effort. You can't complain about politicians or people if you haven't voted. it's a civic duty so I'd say vote out of duty and because it's a citizen's right, but it won't have much influence afterwards.
Pointlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopelessness Frustration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It doesn't matter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have the impression that it's pointless.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pointlessness Resignation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing will change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I never sign petitions on principle. I don't know where they go, what they're for, and so on. I don't know where they go, what they're used for, etc. For me, there's nothing that appeals to me in any of these ways GE_A_M2: In my opinion, the election is the thing that makes the least difference. The masses always vote for the same thing. What the minority wants goes mercilessly under the table. GE_A_F1: I don't feel like I can change anything. Although of course it's important to vote and everything. But I'm just not being picked up. Maybe they have to think of something to reach me. I do not believe that it will bring results I have the impression that it's pointless. We're not being listened to. they didn't listen to us. For me, there's nothing that appeals to me in any of these ways, so I'd say vote out of duty and because it's a citizen's right, but it won't have much influence afterwards.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finally Influence Change Changing Happen Happening Effective Effectiveness Solve Solving Solve problems Power Success Successful Impact Attention Result Outcome Significance Action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change at last Making a difference Make a difference Have an effect Bring about change Have an influence Have an impact Be effective Achieve results Lead to action Shape outcomes Drive change Meaningful action Cause a shift 	
Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solidarity Ally Allyship Unity Support Mobilize Defend Advocate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing solidarity Standing together Fighting for others Showing support Acting in solidarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> And basically, as GE_A_F2 said, for your conscience, you have the feeling that you are doing something. And not just accepting it. Or shows solidarity - whatever. That is also a satisfying feeling. GE_A_F2: The motivation is at least to draw attention to the fact that not everyone agrees. I can't agree with my predecessor, but that is the motivation. At Black Lives Matters demonstrations. Sometimes it's just showing solidarity. In that case at least, because it doesn't affect me directly as you can see. There it was showing solidarity. At Fridays for future too. To show the dissatisfaction you have with some things. And to show that I am ready to demonstrate my free afternoon on Friday. I also know... There were people of all persuasions, we talked, it created debate.

Own compilation (Berkowitz / Weissenbach)

Table 5-4 Semantic fields in the Disconnected Group - Emotional and rational motivations and triggers for different participation options

Code	Connected Words	Connected phrases	Anchor examples
Pointlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopelessness Frustration Pointlessness Resignation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It doesn't matter Nothing will change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrations? We're not being heard! demonstrating is pointless. So I've never demonstrated. Result: nothing. And as far as pensions are concerned, nothing will change. GE_D_F4: Personally, I have reached a point where I can no
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finally Influence Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change at last 	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing • Happen • Happening • Effective • Effectiveness • Solve • Solving • Solve problems • Power • Success • Successful • Impact • Attention • Result • Outcome • Significance • Action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a difference • Make a difference • Have an effect • Bring about change • Have an influence • Have an impact • Be effective • Achieve results • Lead to action • Shape outcomes • Drive change • Meaningful action • Cause a shift 	<p>longer be disappointed after an election. Because, for me, it is clear that no matter what comes in, nothing will change. I still go to the polls so that the parties that don't work for me at all don't get a percentage. But whether it's the CDU or the SPD or the Greens... so, for me, I have no expectation that anything will change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can do whatever you want, you can set half the country on fire and in the end you get nothing. What's the point of putting energy into it? • I personally admire those who act like this. Because they still have hope. Whereas I don't. • It doesn't matter who you vote for, then the parties will get their way anyway. It doesn't matter if you go. • I have no power as an individual • demonstrations don't solve anything. It just makes the one who organises it more visible. • it doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't solve anything.
Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence • Change • Changing • Happen • Happening • Effective • Effectiveness • Solve • Solving • Solve problems • Power • Success • Successful • Impact • Attention • Result • Outcome • Significance • Action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a difference • Make a difference • Have an effect • Bring about chance • Have an influence • Have an impact • Be effective • Achieve results • Lead to action • Shape outcomes • Drive change • Meaningful action • Cause a shift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simply for the reason that if you take part, you have the feeling that you get something back • GE_D_F3: It's all well and good that people can express their opinions, but it would also be nice if there were something like consistently conducted referendums, for example. Where the result is simply taken as it is. Where the result also has an effect. All well and good - you show your opinion. But the people should simply be able to have their say. And many of them more often. • If I knew that it would make sense, that something would happen. • I didn't see the result that the demonstrations changed anything. I don't see the point of it. Let everybody go wherever they want, but I don't see the point. • why participate in it online, so that's probably fast. But I don't know if the online petition would have changed anything in the demonstrations. • 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.



<p>Dissatisfaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissatisfaction • Disappointed • Resignation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It doesn't matter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting changes the government • at presidential level I vote against. • GE_D_F2: GE_D_F3 just wanted to say that something is being done and we Germans sit on our bottoms and do nothing, right? • This is also a way of expressing dissatisfaction and personal opinion. • I agree with that. Many times, taking a distance from a situation or something that you don't agree with, is also a way of expression. Because in the previous elections I did not go to vote with this in mind. However, I believe that even invalid vote (I say an option) is better because it conveys a message... • Yes! They are really worth it because all 3 issues are important, but how to mobilize people? Why is that? Since mobilization will not work. We are all completely disappointed. I don't think we're indifferent. We simply express our disappointment. Those who will stage this protest are likely to be completely rigged. It will be the politicians themselves, the Ruling Party or the Opposition. So why should I act as a stooge? • I'm considering not going to the polls anymore. It doesn't matter who you vote for, then the parties will get their way anyway. It doesn't matter if you go. • there have been a lot of changes and not much for the better.
<p>Self-interest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits • Return • Empowerment • Well-being • Self-value • Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get back • Good for you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And I thought it was great. I thought the benefits were great. And then I said I'd give up my 25 euros a month but in return I'd be insured under occupational health and safety law if there was a dispute with my employer. They also help you with your tax return. They advise you on all work-related issues. And in case I later work in the company they take care of, like Sana or Vivantes or so on - I know in any case that Verdi is behind me. I'm allowed to strike. I thought that was good. • GE_D_M2: Fact not. I can also imagine why the others are in the union, maybe I should think about that too. Simply for the reason that if you take part, you have the feeling that you get something back



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I see that it is a matter of intentions, if someone wants to make the right connections. Many people join political parties aspiring for petty party benefits. • We have associated political parties with benefits, interests, etc., I believe that most people who join political parties expect to gain something in return. Either a job for their children or to make a "useful" connection... • Clearly! It is not selflessly "Because I want to offer". • I agree, those people go there, but it has no result. If 1 demonstration was successful, I would say it has a point. But it has no result, so if I'm driving 250km, freezing there or partying in the sun with no result, why would I do it. I'd rather take the kids for a walk in the countryside. This has no effect.
Dishonesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption • Betrayal • Manipulation • Lies • Hypocrisy • Untrustworthiness • Mislead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Reliability • Honesty • Believe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broken promises • Empty words • Lack of transparency • Pretending to care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep a promise • Keep a word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As soon as they come to power, pretty much the same thing happens, no matter who you choose • And "election lies" - all the eye-catchers that are supposed to attract people, present them and after the election the issue is forgotten until you are called again one year later. That's how I see it. • With hidden benefits! • have their own interests. But trade unionism is not purely for the world either. Executives who unionise also have personal benefits to gain. That is why I am far from them. • I agree! We are being fooled! • Nope. No, because there are interests behind it. • But today's politicians are so hung up on their personal ideals and money,
Distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distant • Detached • Forget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging • Together • Community • Company • Group spirit • Connection • Unity • Inclusion • Connect • Engage • Identify • Join 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the others • You are forgotten <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of unity • Shared identity • Standing together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we're voting to give power to someone who doesn't give a damn about us. • it would have to be a party full of young people with determination, drive. Not to be represented by someone who has been in politics for 50 years. • it's people who haven't completely lost their ideals and are willing to fight. For me it was about disappointment. If I resent something, I don't like to go back. I don't believe it can help anything.



Disinterest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share Interest Involvement Important Everyone Affected Future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everyone is affected Your future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F_D_F1 : If you're not interested in politics... GE_D_M1: That is a very important point that I would like to take up. Personally, I wouldn't join any party because I simply don't have the interest or the strength to take part in all the politics. Me neither! I'm absolutely not interested. I didn't care. I didn't always vote because I wasn't interested. Not being interested... making a choice about something I couldn't give my opinion on...
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Own compilation (Berkowitz / Weissenbach)

Table 5-5 Example Full Data Set- Matching Demand and Supply Side (Screenshot)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	
	RESPONSE UR	RESPONSE TE	RESPONSE USERNAME	RESPONSE GROU	RESPONSE GROU CONFIDENCE	RESPONSE TRIGGER/MOTIVATIO	RESPONSE TRIGGER/ MOTIVATION CONFIDEN	COUNTR	REACTED ACTION TYPE	REACTED TWEET URL	REACTED TWEET AUTHOR USERNA	REACTED TWEET LANGUAGE	REACTED TWEET PLAIN TEXT	REACTED CALL FOR ACTION	REACTED CALL FOR ACTION CONFIDEN	
1	https://twitter.com/Sozis	hassen das Bu	fazer_dorff	OFF_TOPIC	99983364	OFF_TOPIC	93291622	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	ADressel	de	Jede #Steuerentla	OFF_TOPIC	9.836466+15	
2	https://twitter.con	Die SPD m	a#chte v fager_woellmann	DISCONNECTED	95937163	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	71818763	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	ADressel	de	Jede #Steuerentla	OFF_TOPIC	9.836466+15	
3	https://twitter.con	Wohlslein! B	Y" becker_meisler	OFF_TOPIC	99997127	OFF_TOPIC	97951615	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	RenateKuenast	de	Das ungl	laublichst	OFF_TOPIC	9.98792e+15
4	https://twitter.con	Vous êtes d'une	en thyeau	OFF_TOPIC	98511648	OFF_TOPIC	71693361	france	politician	https://twitter.con	faureelver	fr	C&M'est une tr	OFF_TOPIC	9.9789e+15	
5	https://twitter.con	@Martin_Sichert	#000held	OFF_TOPIC	92974323	OFF_TOPIC	84837306	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	Martin_Sichert	de	Das 22 verletzten	OFF_TOPIC	9.93979e+13	
6	https://twitter.con	@Beatrix_vstorch	000held	OFF_TOPIC	78773904	OFF_TOPIC	80703467	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	Beatrix_vstorch	de	Ich muss das noch	OFF_TOPIC	9.98653e+15	
7	https://twitter.con	@Perowinger94	ici000held	DISCONNECTED	99315888	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	98264366	germany	activist	https://twitter.con	Perowinger94	de	in Mannheim erlei	OFF_TOPIC	9.61373e+15	
8	https://twitter.con	@Karl_Lauterbach	000kto	OFF_TOPIC	73139191	OFF_TOPIC	80831277	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	Karl_Lauterbach	de	Deutschland hat n	OFF_TOPIC	9.95929e+15	
9	https://twitter.con	@pokitzeberlin	Nid 000kto	DISCONNECTED	97362947	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	96324033	germany	government	https://twitter.con	polizeiBerlin	de	Mit dem Hissen de	OFF_TOPIC	7.85795e+15	
10	https://twitter.con	@DirkSpaniel	Sie_c000kto	DISCONNECTED	86736876	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	96193331	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	DirkSpaniel	de	So Herr #Bundesg	OFF_TOPIC	9.88764e+15	
11	https://twitter.con	@Georg_Pazderski	000kto	DISCONNECTED	99850976	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	70307207	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	Georg_Pazderski	de	Das kann sie ja j	OFF_TOPIC	9.87129e+15	
12	https://twitter.con	@KathaSchulze	Via 000kto	DISCONNECTED	86029941	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	71967196	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	KathaSchulze	de	Heute in Roth, Gu	ATTENDING_MEE	9.45541e+15	
13	https://twitter.con	@carla_hinrichs	_e000kto	DISCONNECTED	100000417	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	99321038	germany	activist	https://twitter.con	carla_hinrichs	de	Bj # Warmweite i	OFF_TOPIC	9.99979e+15	
14	https://twitter.con	@Georg_Pazderski	000kto	DISCONNECTED	9917466	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	79930019	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	Georg_Pazderski	de	Zwei afrikanische i	OFF_TOPIC	9.71205e+14	
15	https://twitter.con	@KonstantinNotz	(000potus	OFF_TOPIC	93864256	OFF_TOPIC	87610787	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	KonstantinNotz	de	Ein Mitarbeiter de	OFF_TOPIC	9.98989e+15	
16	https://twitter.con	@derya_tn	Niemal 000potus	DISCONNECTED	99997425	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	83548695	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	derya_tn	de	Tja. Wer hätte	gi OFF_TOPIC	9.9914e+15	
17	https://twitter.con	@KonstantinNotz	(000potus	OFF_TOPIC	99901032	OFF_TOPIC	96179895	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	KonstantinNotz	de	Wenn es sich die	g OFF_TOPIC	9.93694e+15	
18	https://twitter.con	@ThomasSarnowski	000potus	DISCONNECTED	78489612	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	93572217	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	ThomasSarnowski	de	!ÜUnser	Demok OFF_TOPIC	9.93107e+15	
19	https://twitter.con	@derya_tn	Wache 000potus	DISCONNECTED	85795497	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	9664259	germany	politician	https://twitter.con	derya_tn	de	18.7. 23: Union w	OFF_TOPIC	9.92146e+15	

5.2. Triggers, emotions and motivations for participatory trust

A first way to explore which triggers, motivations and emotions are behind patterns of participation in different groups of society as described in task 3.4 is to consider a frequency and thematic analysis of the participation related talk in the focus group data across countries. Tables 5.6 and 5.7 show the overall ranking of codes regarding most important reasons expressed by the focus group participants for their possession of participatory trust or not.

Table 5-6 Most important reasons for participatory trust (positive in the dimension participation)

Code	Definition	Possible answer category
Efficacy	This subcategory includes statements concerning the evaluation of the <i>ability</i> to produce the desired or intended result or outcome. For example, the rational decision to participate (to not participate) based on the direct effects associated with the specific form of participation.	It has a direct effect
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.	I was directly affected by a political development
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.	I expected a positive effect for myself
Political Interest	This subcategory includes statements that shows the participants inclination, curiosity, or engagement in	I am in general very interested in politics



	matters related to politics, governance, patterns of engagement or representatives.	
Sense of Duty	This subcategory includes statements concerning thoughts about democratic obligation for everyone. For example to take part in political processes.	It is my duty
Sense of Belonging	This subcategory includes statements concerning a <i>feeling</i> 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	It gave me a sense of belonging
Easy to use	This subcategory includes statements concerning the availability of for example information or forms of participation.	It was very easy to participate

Own compilation, source: Weissenbach and Berkowitz (2023)

Table 5-7 Most important reasons for not having participatory trust (negative in the dimension participation)

Code	Definition	Possible answer category
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 effects associated with the specific form of participation.	I do not expect an effect by participating
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.	It does not change anything to participate
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.	I do not have enough time
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.	I am in general not interested in politics
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.	I am not feeling connected to the different possibilities to participate
Lack of Fit	This subcategory includes statements concerning the evaluation of the political sphere based on the conformity with one's own views. For example, the rational decision to participate based on the personal sense of the representation of one's own views.	Nothing fits my own personal views
Lack of Transparency	This subcategory includes statements concerning the feeling of 'being lost' in the processes of decision-	I am not understanding the process of decision making.



	making (e.g. within the institutions of representative democracy)	
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Own compilation, source: Weissenbach and Berkowitz (2023)

5.3. Triggers, emotions and motivations for different forms of political participation in different societal groups

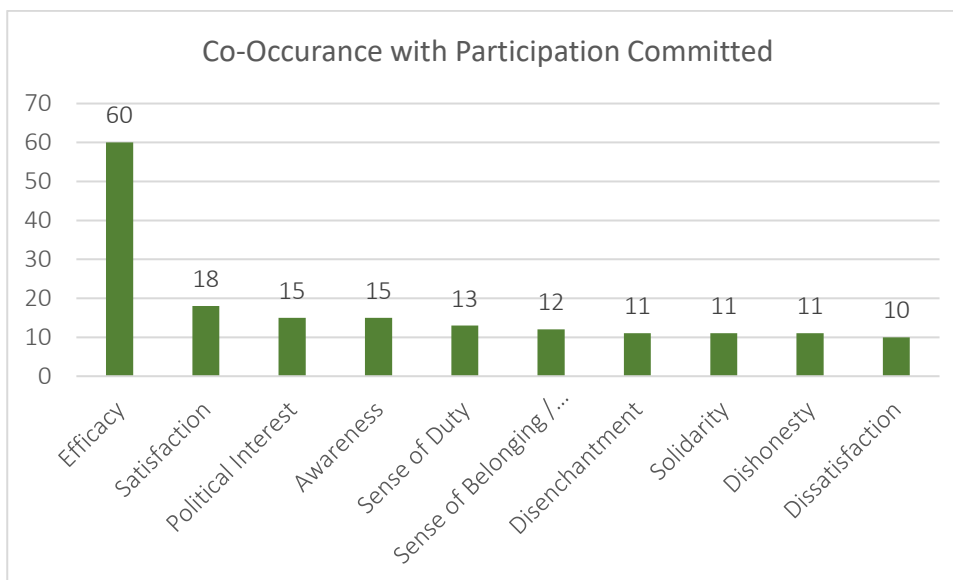
The most frequent general codes, which mark sections of conversations as linked to rational and emotional perceptions that trigger participation or non-participation, are efficacy, satisfaction, political interest, awareness, sense of duty, sense of belonging, disenchantment, solidarity, dishonesty and disaffection, pointlessness, resignation, self-interest, time, and affectedness. Some of these follow prominent patterns across both the three different groups in society – committed, average, disconnected – and the women only groups. We also observe interesting insights on the question of which emotions and motivations trigger which kind of political participation, and what motivates citizens to move from rather conventional forms of political participation inside the institutions of representative democracy to unconventional forms and “outsider” strategies.

Committed Group

The most frequent emotional and rational triggers related to the participation of citizens in the committed group are efficacy, satisfaction, political interest and awareness (see figure 5.1). Efficacy stands out in the committed group, and a similar pattern holds true for the other groups as well. This reveals that in many cases the participants of the focus group discussions evaluate participation opportunities and their own involvement based on efficacy evaluations – their trust in participation options thus seems to rely more than anything else on how efficient they feel their participation contribution is. In other terms, their belief as to whether their actions will influence the desired outcome highly influences their decision to participate or not to participate.

74

Figure 5-1 Co-occurrence of emotional/rational triggers and motivations with participation in the committed group

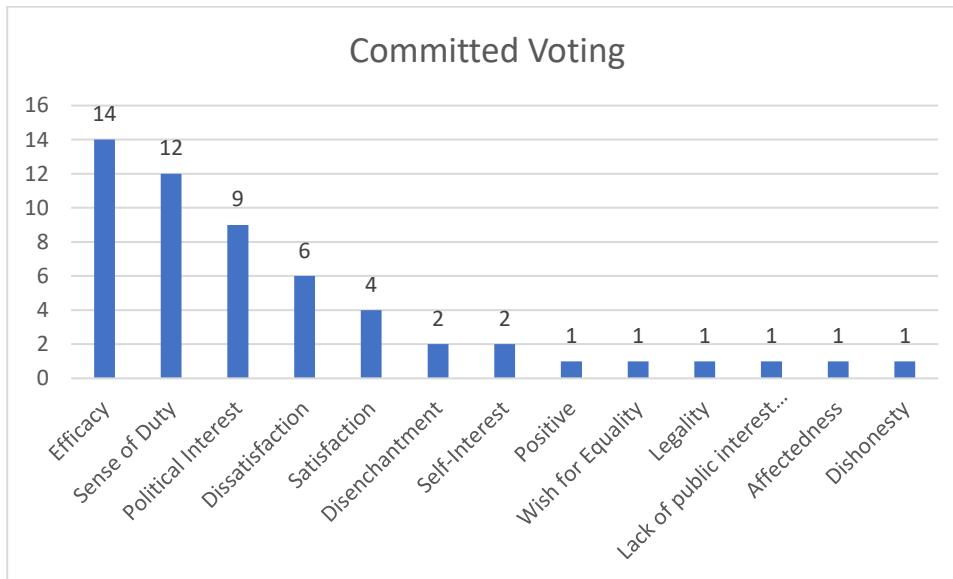


Rational and emotional motivations and triggers vary with reference to different participation options – inside or outside the institutions of representative democracy. Starting with *the* classic conventional form of political participation of representative democracy – voting – we find that the efficacy pattern holds, but also another motivation stands out as important for participation in the form of voting: sense of duty (figure 5.2). The perception that it is one's duty as a citizen to go out and vote stands out in the committed group: “Yes, I just want to say that I think voting is



extremely important and of course it is a privilege that we can vote in Germany and that we live in a democracy and at the same time it is a duty” (GE_C_F2).

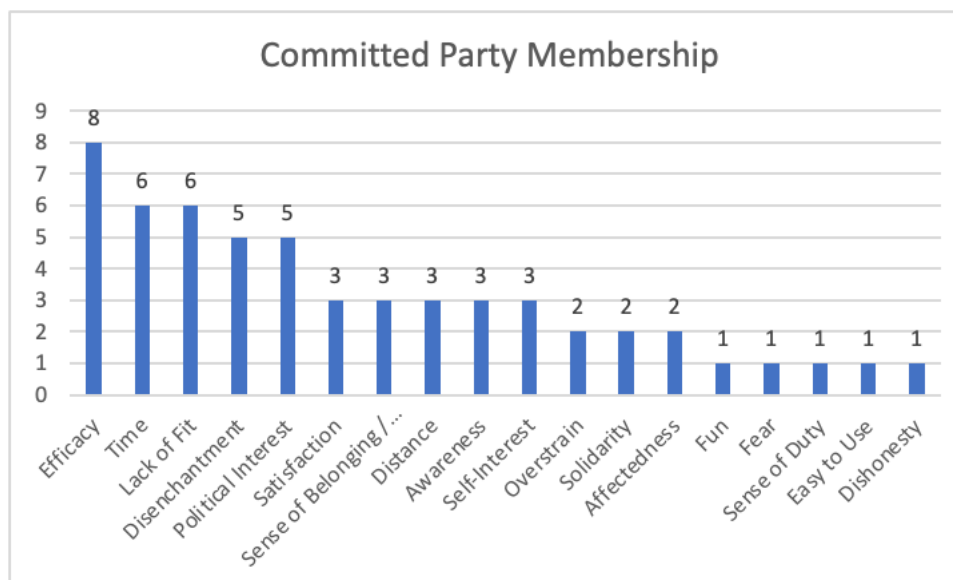
Figure 5-2 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with voting in the committed group



In contrast, when the committed focus group participants discuss party membership - one of the conventional participation forms as an institution of representative democracy - they frequently highlight why they feel this makes little sense, and link this perception to the feeling that party membership is not efficient, that they don't have the time (which stands out in contrast to other participation forms), or that it doesn't fit their interests and that they feel distant and that they do not 'belong' to a political party (figure 5.3).

75

Figure 5-3 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with party membership in the committed group

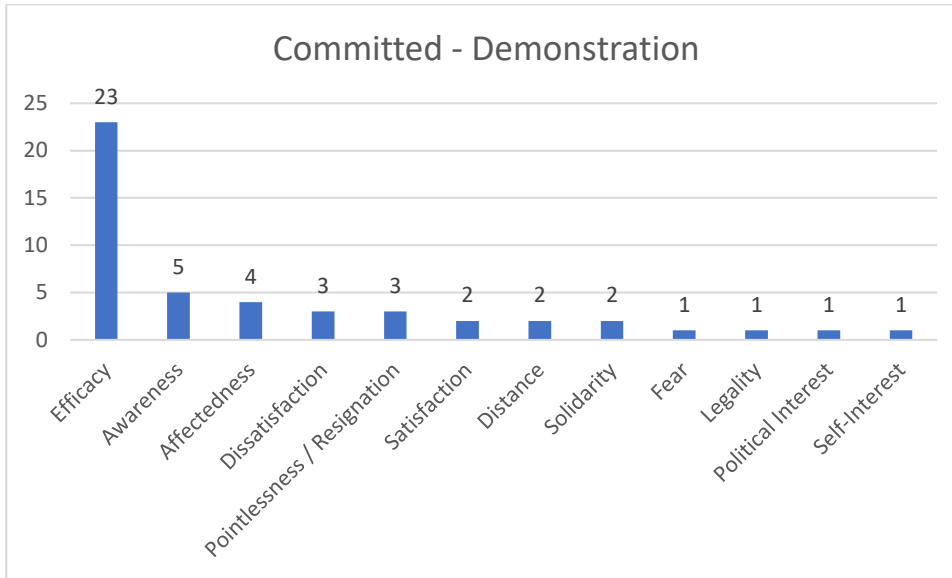


Which emotions and motivations, in turn, trigger participation in a demonstration in the committed group? When participants of the committed focus groups discuss the benefits and disadvantages of joining a demonstration, they discuss the direct effect (efficacy) of their action more than anything else. In addition, raising awareness, being dissatisfied about politics and being directly affected and involved by the programmatic topic behind the demonstration also appear to



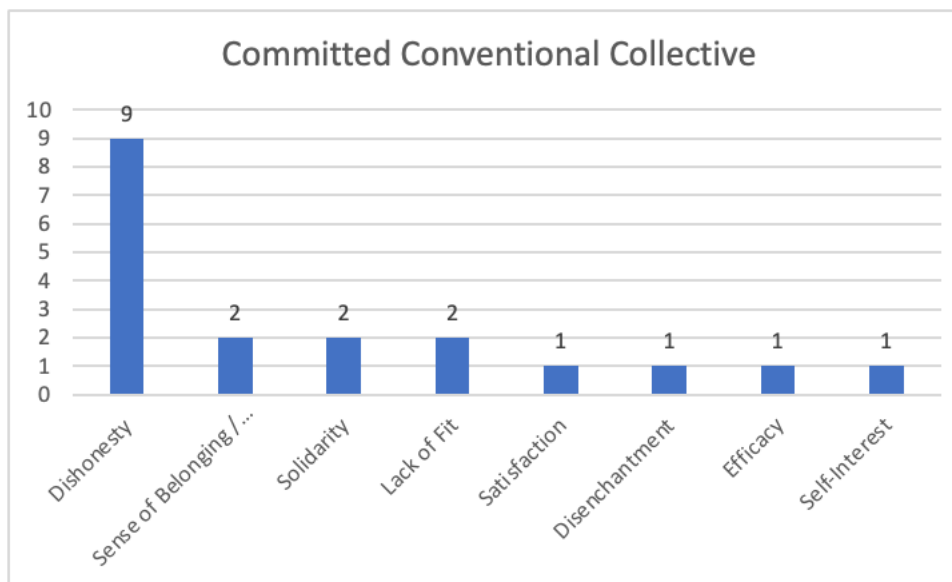
motivate participation in demonstrations (e.g. “Making known one's dissatisfaction - with the status quo. And to show solidarity. And together, simply making your voice louder through the means of demonstration”, GE_C_M3).

Figure 5-4 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with demonstration in the committed group



Overall, when focus group participants in the committed group discuss conventional collective participation forms (like party membership), they link these actions to the emotions coded as dishonesty, sense of belonging, or solidarity (figure 5.5)

Figure 5-5 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with conventional collective participation forms in the committed group

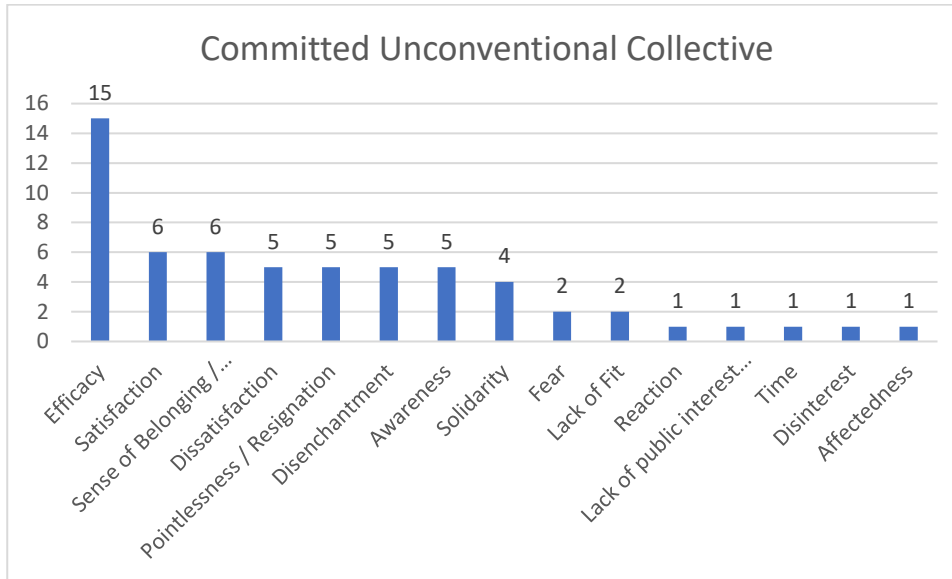


In contrast, talk about “outsider strategies”, unconventional collective action and more contentious participation forms, are linked to efficacy and satisfaction feelings in the committed group (figure 5.6). A sense of belonging to the group carrying out the action is emphasised, as well as the feeling of “Making known one's dissatisfaction - with the status quo. And to show solidarity. And together, simply making your voice louder through the means of demonstration” / “. Because visibility and attention are achieved through all of them. 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" (CE-C-M3).

Figure 5-6 : Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with unconventional collective participation forms in the committed group



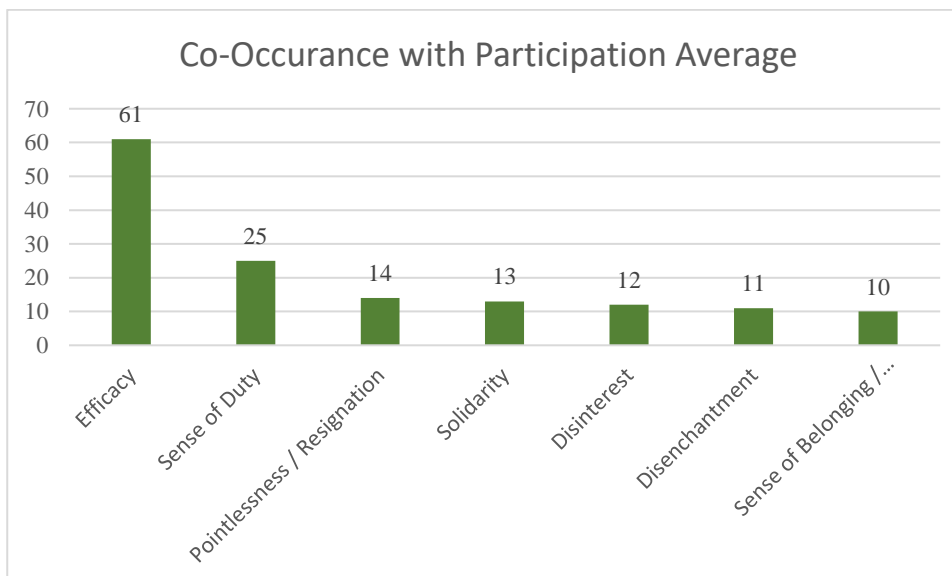
Average Group

In the average group – the focus groups gathering participants with mean levels of trust in the political system, who are less politically interested and have low to little political involvement – the emotional and rational triggers and motivations for political participation that emerge are: efficacy, sense of duty, pointlessness/resignation, solidarity, disinterest, disenchantment, and the sense of belonging (figure 5.8).

77

Efficacy stands out as it did for the committed group. This suggests again that in many cases participants in the focus group discussions evaluate participation opportunities and their own involvement based on efficacy assessments – their trust in participation options rests on how efficient they feel their participation to be.

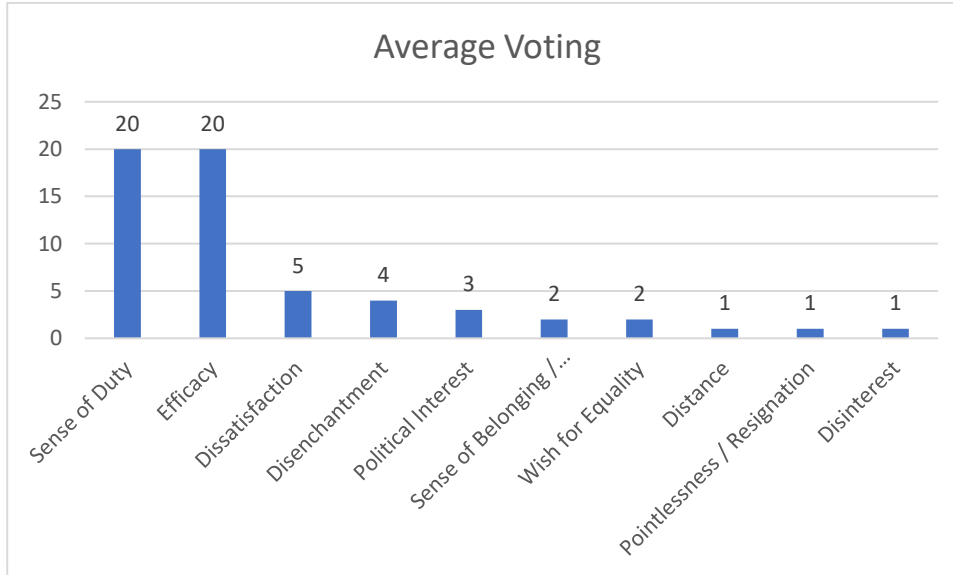
Figure 5-7 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with participation in the average group





Even more than in the committed group, the feeling that it is one's duty as a citizen to go and vote is discussed in the average group. Voting is also seen as an efficient way of getting engaged. The sense of duty and efficacy are the two predominant motivations for citizens of the average group to participate in this conventional form of political participation inside the institutions of representative democracy (figure 5.8).

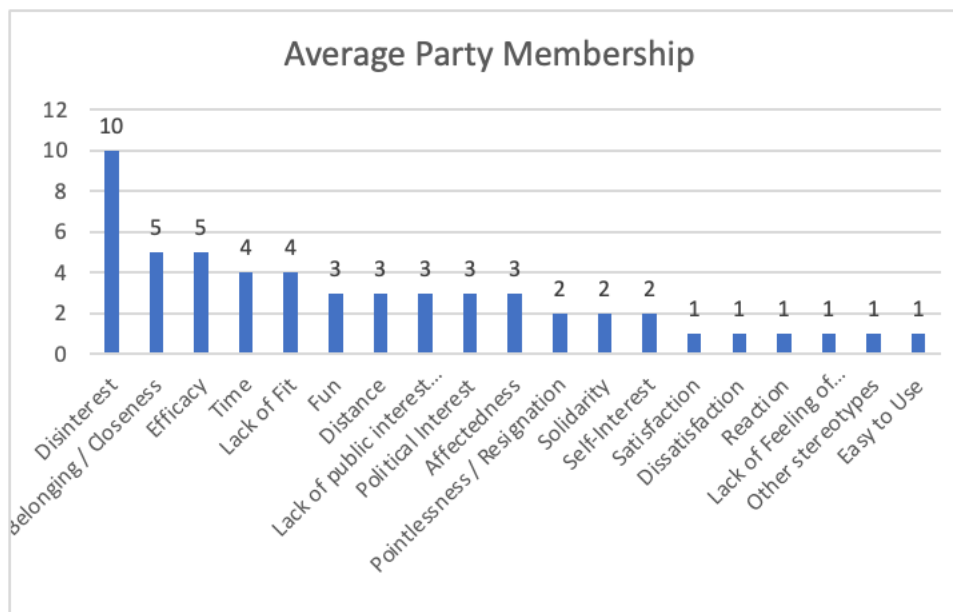
Figure 5-8 : Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with voting in the average group



In contrast, when the focus group participants in the average group discuss party membership, they frequently highlight that they are not interested and do not feel close to political parties. They state that this action is pointless and no fun, that they don't have time to get engaged in such a time-consuming form of political participation (albeit to a lesser extent when compared to the committed group) (figure 5.9).

78

Figure 5-9 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with party membership in the average group

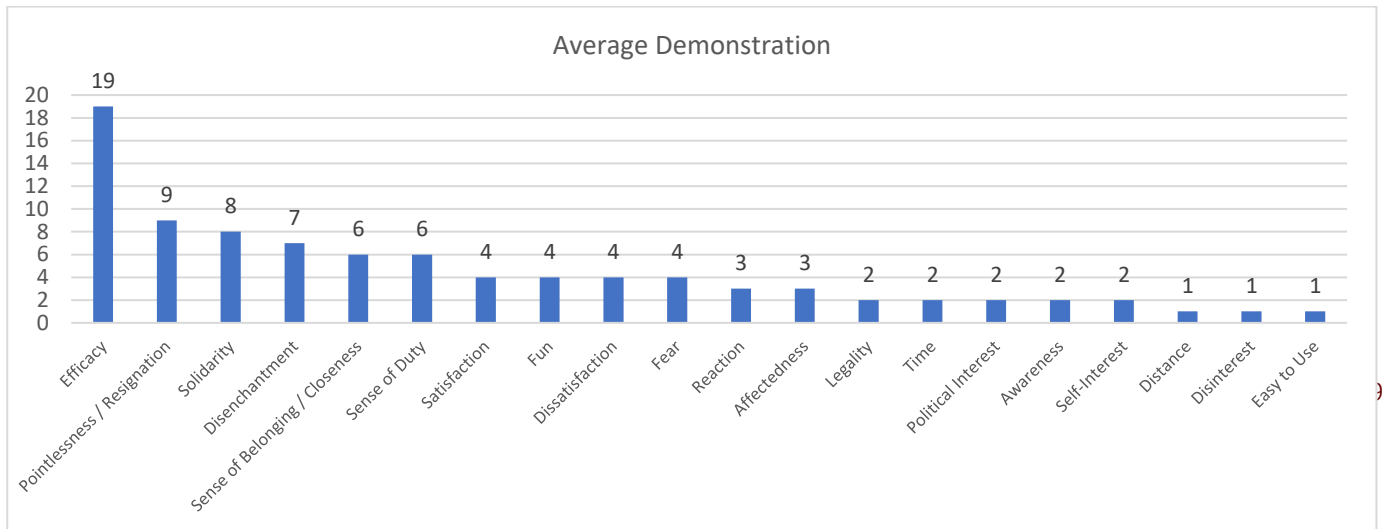


Turning to triggers, emotions and motivations for unconventional forms of political participation which often (but not necessarily) unfold outside the institutions of representative democracy, we



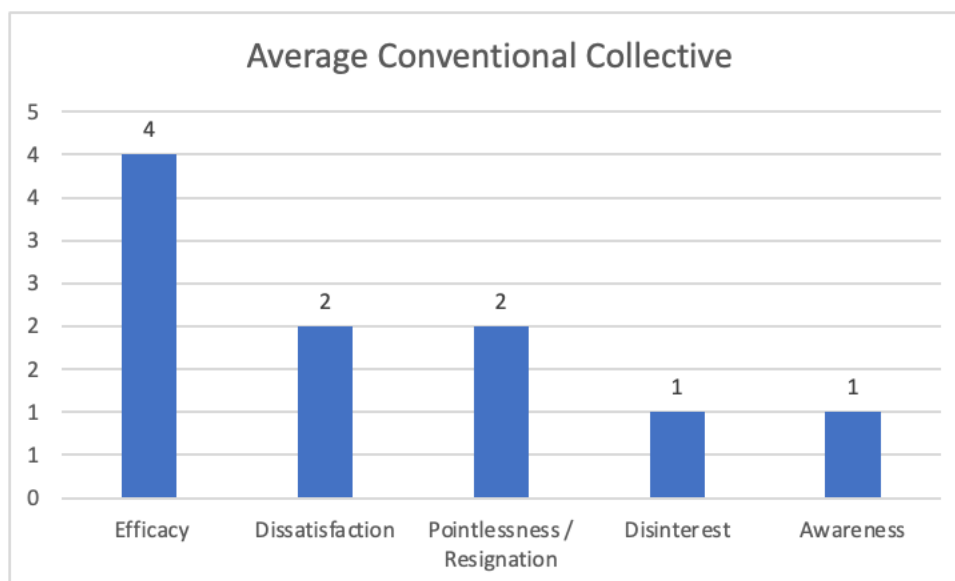
observe that representatives of the average group perceive demonstrations as an efficient way to make their voices heard, that they feel resignation with regard to conventional forms of political participation, and therefore turn to demonstrations to participate, also in order to demonstrate their solidarity (figure 5.10): "(...) you have the feeling that you are doing something. And not just accepting it. Or shows solidarity - whatever. That is also a satisfying feeling. (...) The motivation is at least to draw attention to the fact that not everyone agrees. I can't agree with my predecessor, but that is the motivation. At Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Sometimes it's just showing solidarity. In that case at least, because it doesn't affect me directly as you can see. There it was showing solidarity. At Fridays for Future too. To show the dissatisfaction you have with some things (...) (GE_A_F2)

Figure 5-10 : Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with demonstration in the average group



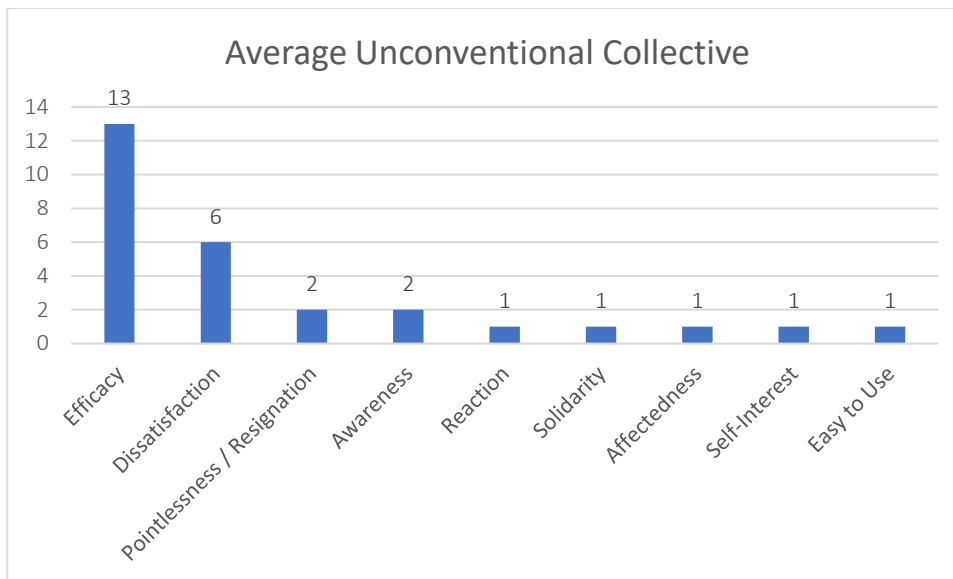
Overall, in the average group, conventional and collective forms of political participation are also linked, to a lesser extent when compared to more positive feelings, to triggers and motivations of efficacy, dissatisfaction, pointlessness, resignation, disinterest and awareness. All of these perceptions connect participation options to negative feelings for the average group (figure 5.11)

Figure 5-11 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with conventional collective participation forms in the average group



When discussing all the different forms of unconventional and collective forms of political participation, participants in the average focus groups mention emotional and rational triggers and motivations like efficacy, dissatisfaction and pointlessness as reasons why they turn to actions outside the institutions of representative democracy (figure 5.12). Their motivation for engaging in unconventional “outsider” forms of participation is to have an impact, to raise awareness for a certain topic, to react, and show solidarity: “I also think that shock actions have the most impact. Sitting, when it blocks everything even if the repercussions are mainly on us (for petrol, for example). Signing petitions is also good” (F_A_M2).

Figure 5-12 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with unconventional collective participation forms in the average group



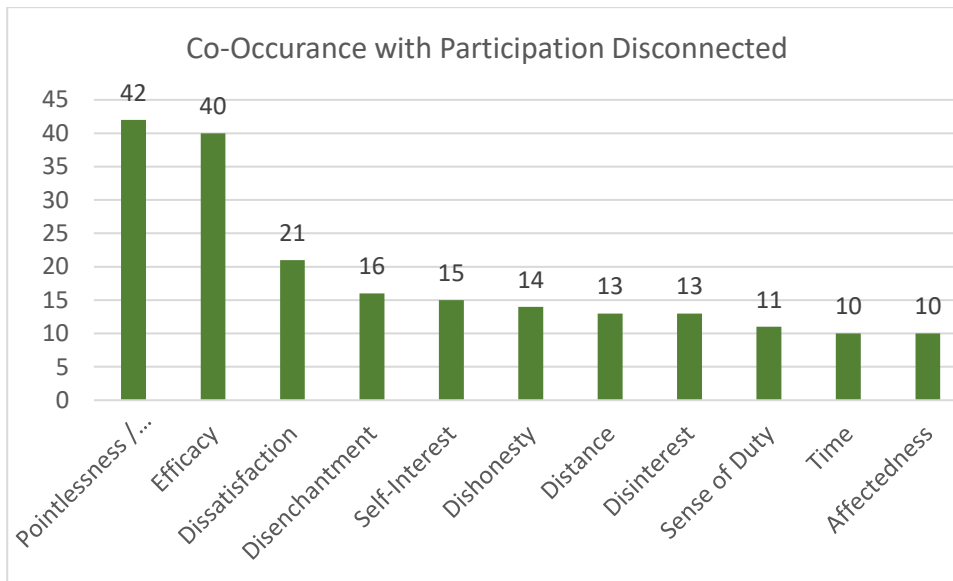
Disconnected Group

Turning to the group of citizens that – in the focus group design – was characterised as politically uninterested and not participating, we observe that a different trigger/motivation-participation pattern stands out.

The most frequent trigger related to the (non-)participation of citizens in the disconnected group is an emotional code: Pointlessness and resignation. This is followed by – again – efficacy, and the rational and emotional triggers dissatisfaction, disenchantment, self-interest, dishonesty, distance, disinterest, sense of duty, time and affectedness (see figure 5.13). This reveals that in many cases participants in this group evaluate participation opportunities and their own involvement based on emotional aspects – their trust in participation options thus seems to rely more than anything else on whether they feel that their action makes a change, makes a difference and is meaningful.



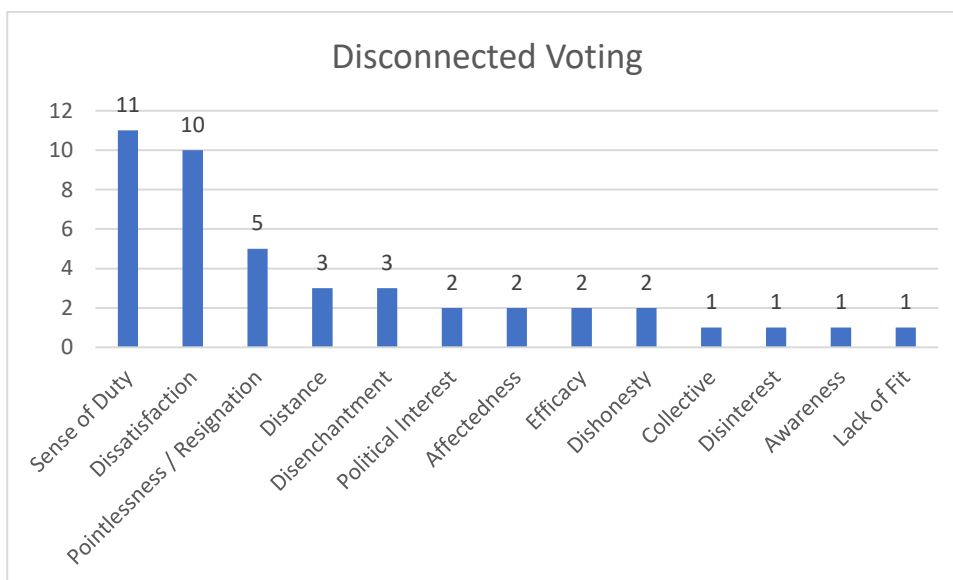
Figure 5-13 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with participation in the disconnected group



One of the rare motivations to participate at all in the disconnected group is the feeling that it is a citizen's duty to vote (figure 5.13). As in the other groups, this pattern seems to be stable, the sense of duty motivates this conventional form of participation, even though the action itself is often seen as ineffective: "Personally, I have reached a point where I can no longer be disappointed after an election. Because, for me, it is clear that no matter what comes in, nothing will change. I still go to the polls so that the parties that don't work for me at all don't get a percentage. But whether it's the CDU or the SPD or the Greens... so, for me, I have no expectation that anything will change" (GE_D_F4).

81

Figure 5-14 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with voting in the disconnected group

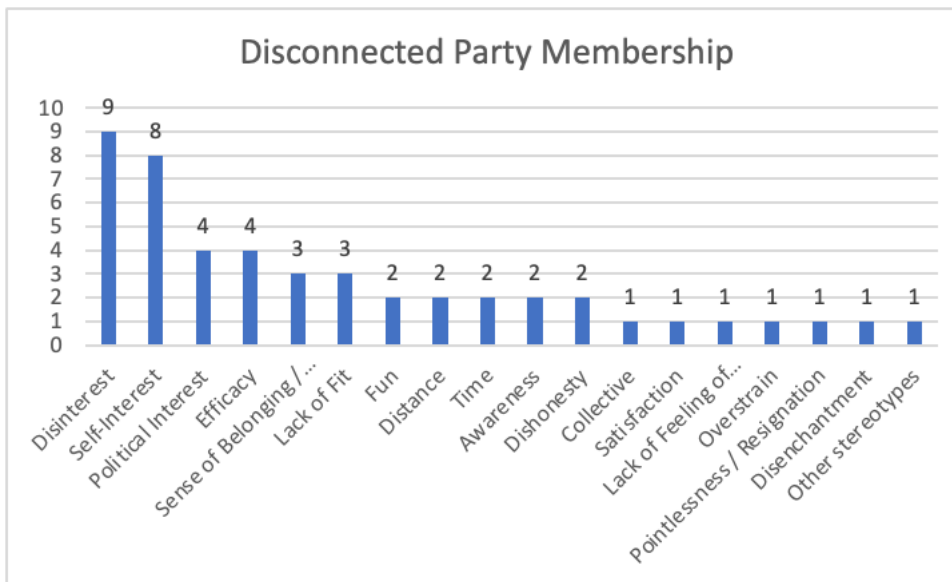


"We have associated political parties with benefits, interests, etc.; I believe that most people who join political parties expect to gain something in return. Either a job for their children or to make a "useful" connection"



This quote is a good illustration of how participants in the disconnected focus group discussed political participation through party membership. Overall, they are not interested in becoming a member of a political party, but a motivation to change this would be self-interest or political interest. Emotional arguments, like seeking belonging, are less discussed, but still emerge as relatively important, followed by aspects such as “lack of fit”, “distance”, “fun”, “time” or “awareness”.

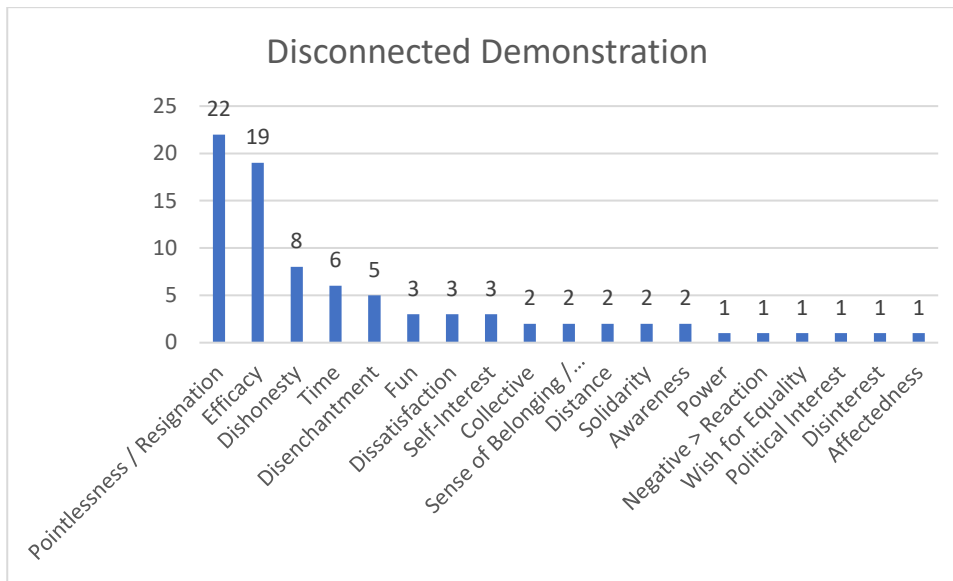
Figure 5-15 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with party membership in the disconnected group



When citizens in the disconnected groups talk about demonstrations, they mention the feeling of “pointlessness” and “resignation” more than anything else. This is followed by – once again – efficacy, dishonesty, or time (figure 5.16). Demonstrations are valued as a nice form of participation, but are not regarded as effective. “It’s all well and good that people can express their opinions, but it would also be nice if there were something like consistently conducted referendums, for example. Where the result is simply taken as it is. Where the result also has an effect. All well and good - you show your opinion. But the people should simply be able to have their say. And many of them more often” (GE_D_F3).

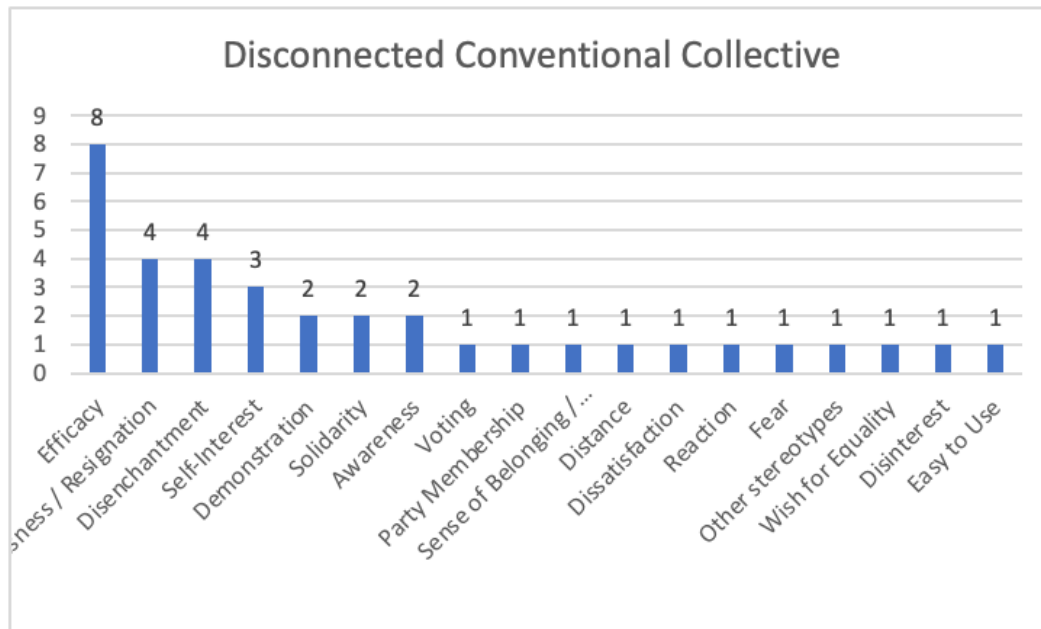


Figure 5-16 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with demonstration in the disconnected group



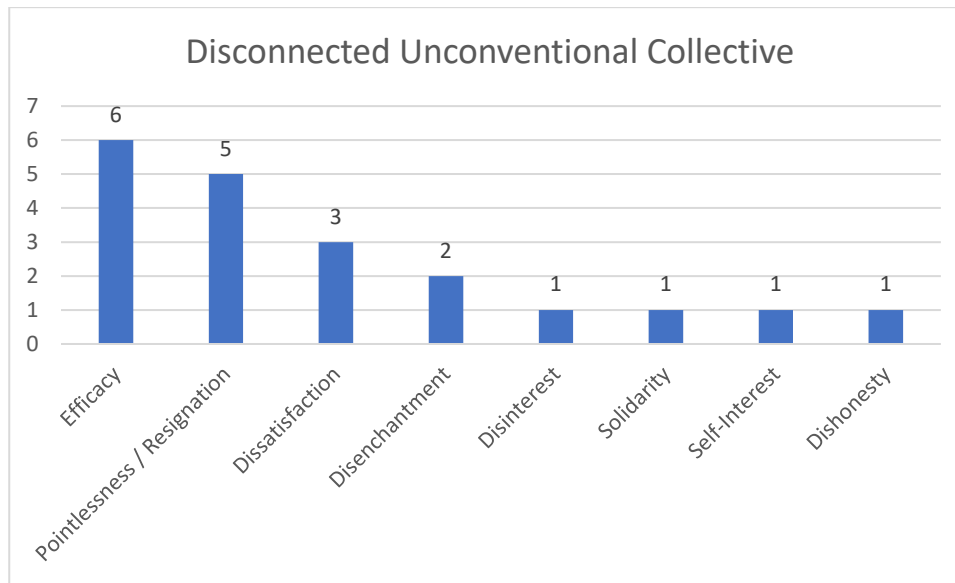
Overall, when participants in the disconnected group discuss conventional collective forms of political participation rational perceptions like efficacy – or not having an effect – explain why they do not engage in participation forms inside the institutions of representative democracy. Emotional perceptions like resignation or disenchantment stand out as well (figure 5.17).

Figure 5-17 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with conventional collective participation forms in the disconnected group



On the other hand, when citizens in the disconnected group talk about unconventional collective forms of political participation (figure 5.18), references to efficacy, pointlessness, and resignation appear as powerful negative triggers, indicating that perceptions of systemic unresponsiveness may create significant barriers to this group's engagement.

Figure 5-18 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with unconventional collective participation forms in the disconnected group



Women's Group

This subsection zooms in to look at women's participation demands in the focus group data, exploring the emotions, triggers, and motivations that underlie their engagement (or disengagement) with various forms of political participation. It seeks to operationalise how the most salient emotions, triggers, and motivations are voiced in relation to participation in this data.

84

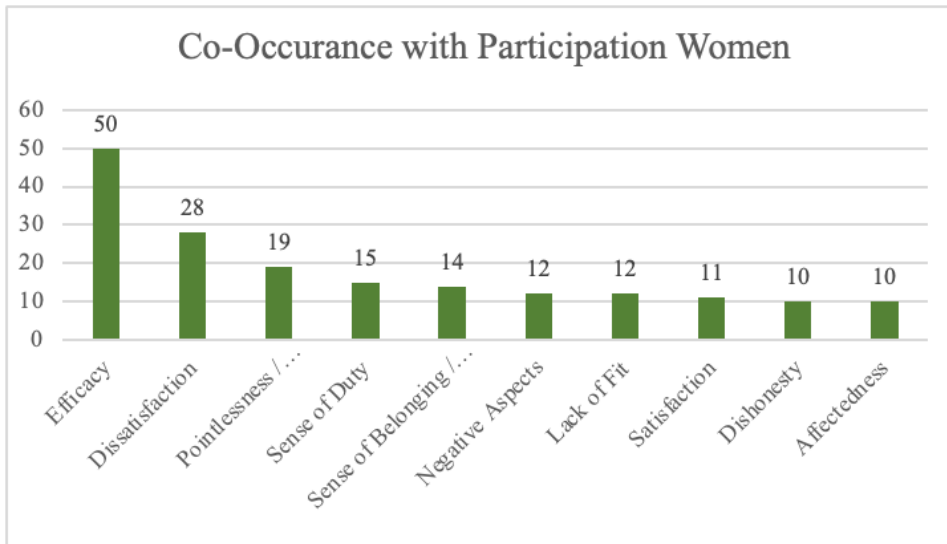
We give an overview of the most prevalent triggers and their distribution across different modes of participation. In addition, we show rich examples of how these concerns are voiced, focusing on five key themes that emerged as particularly prominent within the women-only focus groups: efficacy, dissatisfaction, pointlessness/resignation, sense of duty, and sense of belonging/closeness. By examining these themes across different types of participation—demonstrations, party membership, voting, unconventional collective action, and conventional collective action—we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the triggers that shape women's participatory behaviour.

Across all participation channels we can identify the most prevalent positive and negative triggers, before turning to the difference in patterns across specific conventional and unconventional forms of participation. Most notably, efficacy concerns are often voiced in relation to participation decisions across all forms, suggesting that women's belief in their ability to effect change is central to their engagement. Dissatisfaction with current political systems or outcomes emerges as the second most prevalent factor, often serving as an initial motivator for participation, though its effect varies depending on whether women perceive available participation channels as effective remedies for their grievances.

Pointlessness and resignation appear as powerful negative triggers, particularly in relation to conventional forms of participation, indicating that perceptions of systemic unresponsiveness may create significant barriers to women's engagement. At the same time, sense of duty appears as a strong motivation for participation but may only be present for specific namely voting, suggesting that normative considerations may override efficacy concerns for this particular form of participation. Sense of belonging shows varied influence across participation types, especially for

collective forms of action, highlighting the importance of community connection in mobilizing women's participation.

Figure 5-19 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with participation in the women group



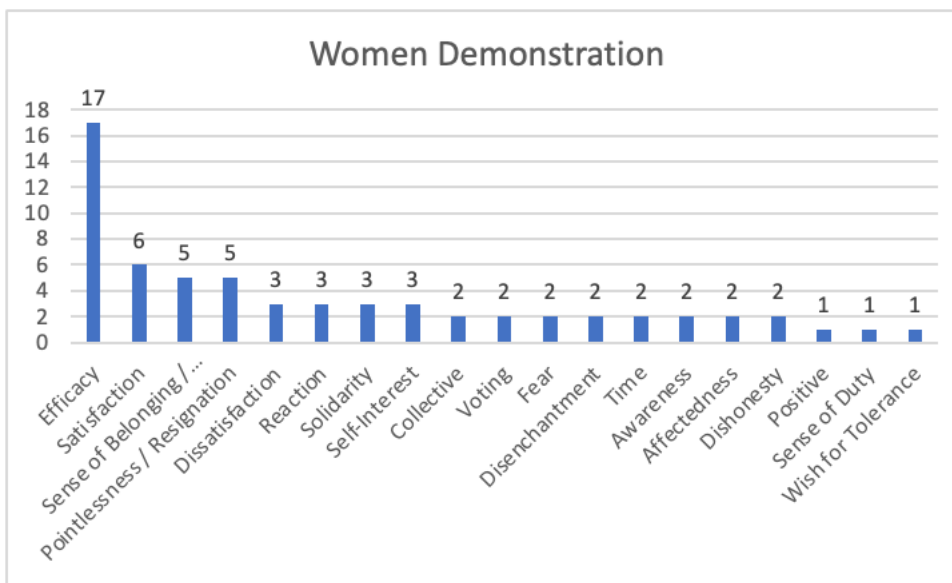
Motivations for participation in demonstrations mirrors the overall patterns voiced in relation to efficacy. Efficacy evaluations thus appear closely linked to demonstration participation, with women more likely to engage when they believe that visible public protest can generate media attention and subsequently political pressure. For instance, participants note that “*demonstrations have the advantage that the masses are seen. And you tend to have the feeling that if it's a big crowd, you're more likely to achieve something. Because it also attracts media attention and so on*” (Women Focus Group Germany). Other participants also note the importance of making “*yourself visible*” as it “*makes more sense than remaining invisible*” (Women Focus Group, Germany). Among linked motivations to participate in demonstrations are for “things to get better” and “to be heard” (Women Focus Group, Greece). Even when the issues they are concerned about are not salient on the political agenda, some participants see demonstrations as a way to intensify pressure, for instance on racism or same-sex marriages, “*putting [them] on the map [...] for society as a whole*”, highlighting how visibility in the media of “*recurring protests like Christopher Street Day*” contributed to the equalisation of gay marriage (Women Focus Group, Germany). Others also highlight the effectiveness of large-scale demonstrations, as “*so many thousands of people protesting [...] doesn't go unnoticed*” highlighting how “*If there are such long marches all the time, [...] a lot of things will change*” (Women Focus Group, Greece).

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In addition, women appear particularly motivated to join demonstrations when they perceive a direct connection between their grievances and specific policy issues or systemic problems. Participants offer the example of “*demonstrations [as] useful [for] improving one's starting position*” for instance “*trade unions [...] to improve my working conditions*”. (Women Focus Group, Germany). Even when efficacy is called into question (doubting “*what real impact [demonstrations] have*”, some participants “*see them as a very important part of democracy, a space where [they] can express ourselves*” for instance in connection to causes they are concerned about, in this case “*human rights demonstrations*” (Women Focus Group, Czechia). Similar motivations are put forward by other participants in relation to other causes, participating in “*the pension reform demonstration [as they] felt concerned*” (Women Focus Group, France).

Besides efficacy, satisfaction is the most prevalent factor pointed to for participation in demonstrations along with a sense of belonging. In both cases, these triggers are present almost exclusively in one specific participation type, namely unconventional collective forms for satisfaction and conventional collective forms for sense of belonging (see figure 5.20, 5.23 and 5.24). Conversely, perceptions of pointlessness represent the strongest negative trigger, particularly when women doubt that demonstrations will translate into concrete policy changes. Some acknowledge that while “*it is important to get to the street to support something you believe in, to protest something [...] how often it [is] productive is another matter*” (Women Focus Group, Greece). For some participants this is a reason not to participate as they believe “*now the power is elsewhere [, ...] not on the streets [but ...] in the media*” (Women Focus Group, Greece).

Figure 5-20 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with demonstration in the women group



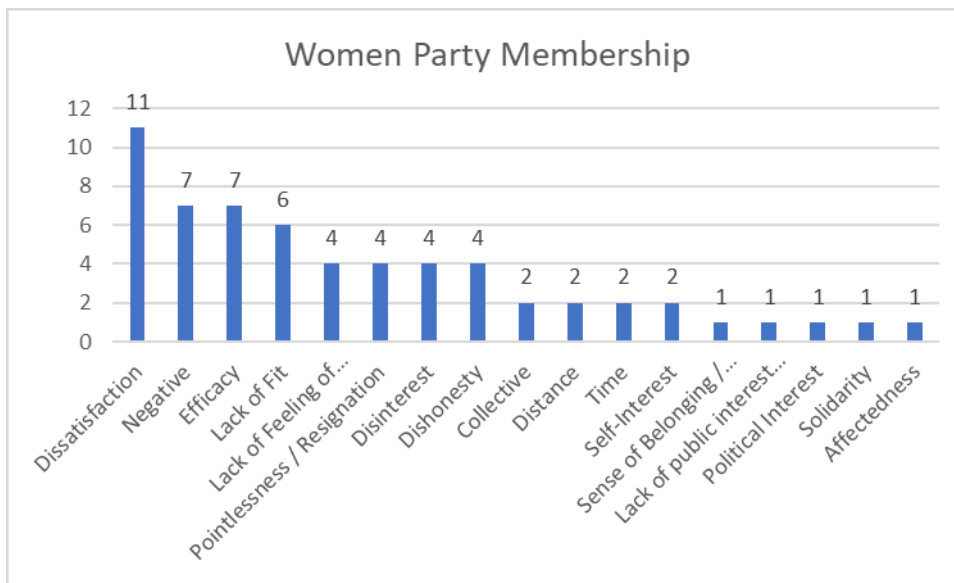
Party membership shows the most polarised emotions and trigger profile among the participation forms we consider. It is the only participation form for which an unequivocally negative trigger is the most prominent: dissatisfaction and other negative emotions. For instance, organisational aspects such as party structures and internal democracy may hinder willingness to engage with this form of participation. Some participants refer directly to party structures as “*male*” and giving space “*only [to] a certain type of person*” noting that even a woman “*just has to behave the same way*” (Women Focus Group, Germany).

Lack of fit and lack of representation are also quite prominent negative triggers. Disinterest and dishonesty are similarly present among the negative emotions associated with party membership. Some participants consider non-participation “*because [they] don't see anything there that represents [them] concretely*” (Women Focus Group, Germany). Some declare “*no interest in joining a party [as they] don't have the feeling that they really represent what [they] would like to have*” (Women Focus Group, Germany). Others note “*an identification problem [as they] find it hard to feel close to a party*” noting that “*there's no figure that represents [their] ideas*” and highlighting how “*there's always something about a person that goes against [their] values*” (Women Focus Group, France).

The only not entirely negative trigger mentioned somewhat frequently is efficacy – which may both be voiced as a positive or negative evaluation regarding the ability to affect outcomes. Some

participants note that while they are not currently party members, they "have had good experiences [as] in the party where [they were] active, you can get involved very quickly from the grassroots". In this context decision making based on "a very grassroots democratic structure" is mentioned as a positive motivation, but even in contexts in which efficacy may be present other challenges may arise as they "quickly realised that [actively participating] is a full-time job" (Women Focus Group, Germany). Yet others also note that joining a political party "is probably the way to go" for "something long-term, more meaningful" (Women Focus Group, Czechia). This participation channel is, however, the only one in which efficacy is not the most prominent motivation.

Figure 5-21 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with party membership in the women group

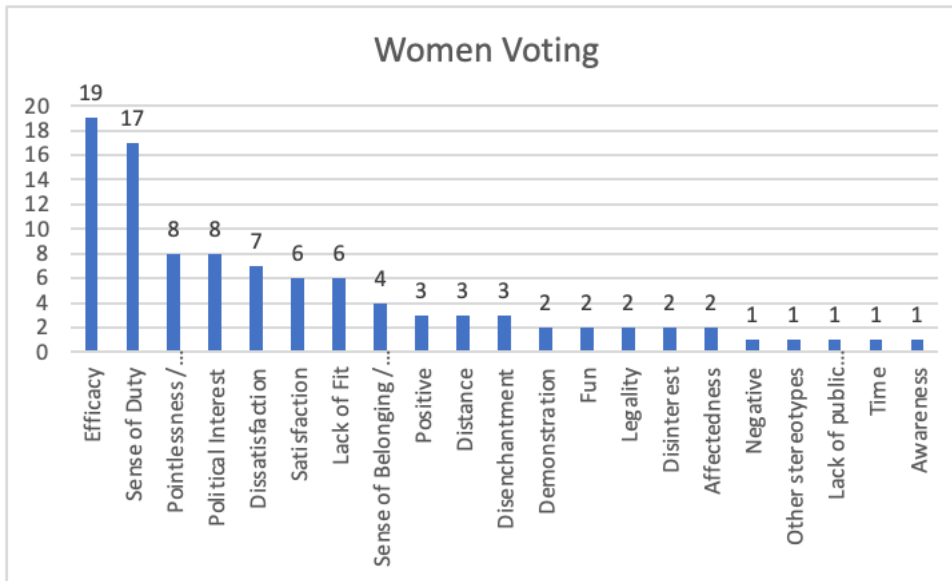


Voting replicates the pattern of efficacy as the most frequent trigger for participation. However, it stands out for its unique relationship with sense of duty, showing the strongest co-occurrence between normative considerations and participation of any participation form. Women frequently frame voting as a fundamental democratic responsibility regardless of efficacy evaluations, often referencing historical struggles for women's suffrage. Some participants refer to it as "the number one form of participation" (Women Focus Group, Greece). Others mention that they voted even if they saw it as "wasted because [on] a super small party" as they wanted "to use [their] right", even in a context of no presumption of efficacy (Women Focus Group, Germany). Others also highlight "the right to vote" and "choose the party you vote for" as a fundamental form of participation (Women Focus Group, France). In addition to highlighting the normative importance of voting, some mention directly the sense of duty motivation. Some note they "always go to the election to have a good conscience", indicating that they can still feel like they "at least [...] prevented some of the worst" (Women Focus Group, Czechia). Others remark that voting is "a personal responsibility" for the "impetus you're going to give to the politicians that are going to be chosen" (Women Focus Group France). Historical considerations also emerge, some noting for this form of participation they override the importance not only of efficacy but also feelings of representation. A participant notes that "people have fought for this" as a motivation that "even if you don't feel represented, you have to go out to vote" (Women Focus Group, France).

Voting is the participation form least affected by time or accessibility constraints, likely due to its relatively low participation threshold. Beyond these two top triggers positive and negative factors

are both present. In order of frequency, we find pointlessness as well as political interest, followed by references to both dissatisfaction and satisfaction.

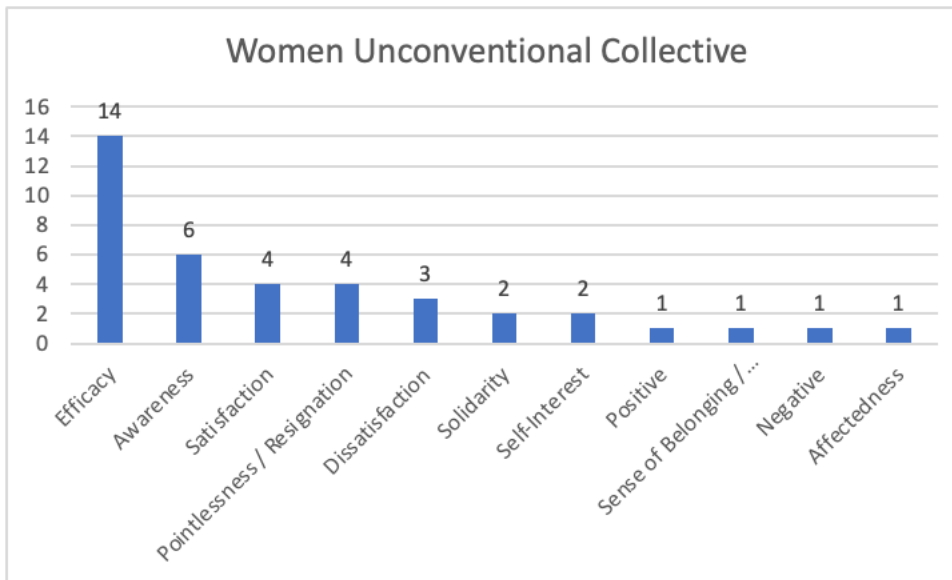
Figure 5-22 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with voting in the women group



Unconventional collective actions (such as boycotts and online campaigns) also fall into the prevalent pattern of efficacy as the most important trigger, followed by awareness and satisfaction. This may suggest that visibility is especially important for this participation channel. For conventional collective action (including petitions, community organising, and formal consultations), the focus groups show a balanced distribution of positive and negative triggers. Efficacy considerations are again the most prevalent, closely tied to institutional responsiveness, with women more likely to engage when they believe authorities will meaningfully consider collective expressions. For unconventional forms of collective participation, some participants remark that they “also see it as effective [as] it penetrates the consciousness”(Women Focus Group, Germany). The sense of belonging is the second most frequent trigger. On the negative side, along with general dissatisfaction, dishonesty concerns appear as the most frequent trigger with regards to this participation form. Some participants echo these negative concerns highlighting that the actions of activists sometimes “didn't even make sense”, referring to the example of an action vandalising artwork and noting that “there are a lot of activists like that” with the negative implication that for example “when you mention that you're interested in the environment [...] you're not taken very seriously”(Women Focus Group, Czechia).



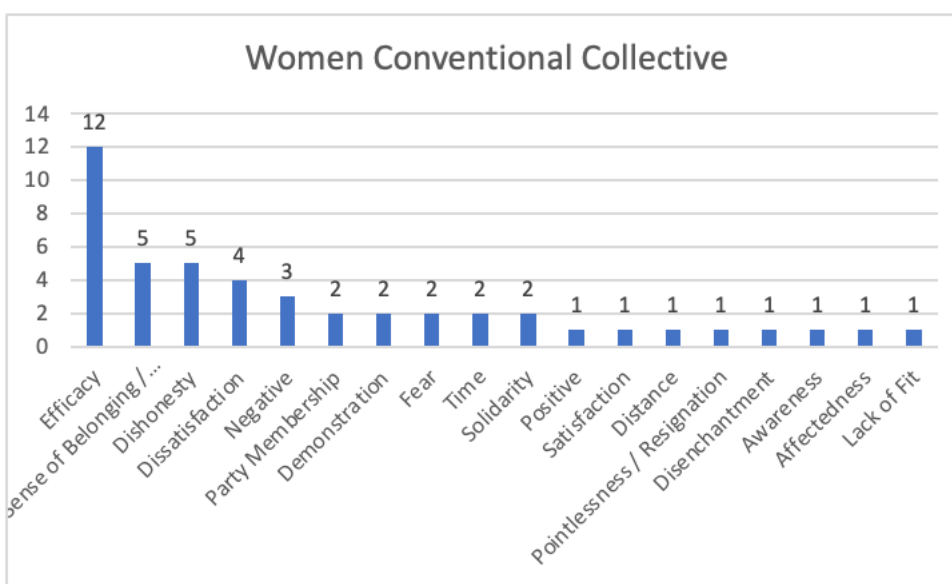
Figure 5-23 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with unconventional collective participation forms in the women group



When referring to conventional collective actions along with efficacy, some participants highlight satisfaction as an important trigger. An example is a participant that highlights how they are *“really happy when the unions negotiate something good”*, underlining at the same time that without people committing to this form of participation she *“would have worse conditions in [her]life”* and that she does *“believe that some things have an influence”* (Women Focus Group Germany). Participants in a similar domain remark that *“the only thing that really made a difference [are] the strikes”* (Women Focus Group, Germany). In a different domain, others highlight the sense of efficacy and satisfaction from voluntary work, noting that *“there’s a real feeling of usefulness and you can see the results of what you do directly”*, for instance through her participation in the Red Cross (Women Focus Group, France).

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Figure 5-24 Co-occurrence emotional/rational triggers and motivations with conventional collective participation forms in the women group





This analysis reveals the interplay of emotional, pragmatic, and normative triggers shaping women's political participation. While efficacy concerns appear particularly salient across most participation forms, their specific expressions vary depending on the mode of engagement and other emotions and triggers are channel-specific (e.g. sense of duty and sense of belonging). The findings suggest that addressing barriers to women's participation requires attending not only to structural obstacles but also to these subjective dimensions that influence how women evaluate different participation opportunities as well as granular understanding of how they vary across their forms.

5.4. Triggers, emotions and motivations for different forms of political participation in different semantic groups – bringing the online space in

In this part of the chapter, we combine two ActEU data sources, focus group data for the committed, average and disconnected groups, and webscraped data from X, to gain further insights into our overall research question: which triggers, motivations, emotions and dynamics are behind patterns of participation in different groups in society? In line with this, the focus group data was used to train supervised classifiers to find distinct semantic groups in the webscraped data from X to find the emotions and motivations behind patterns of participation. We once again provide a brief recap of the methodological steps before outlining the findings.

From Focus groups to semantic groups on social media

First, we hand labelled examples of triggers and motivations to identify suitable instances in the focus group data. We then machine-translated the manually labelled examples from German into these languages (Czech, French and Greek). Subsequently, we trained three supervised classifiers: one for categorising groups (average, committed, disconnected) and another for the group plus the trigger and motivation behind patterns of participation. We then extracted all tweets published by seed accounts, including calls to action, and gathered all replies and quotes from common users to these tweets that achieved confidence levels of 70% and that had at least 10 interactions with any seed account over the time span covered (the average number of interactions for the average group is 23, for the committed group 25, and for the disconnected group 32). This included the text from key actors and the text from common users interacting with the key actors' content. Finally, we applied the classifiers to this second list of texts to tentatively assign each of them a group and a trigger. Thus, we see the emotional and motivational reactions of common users to calls of action in the seed accounts, i.e. the supply side.

Analysis of Semantic Groups based on Webscraped Data from X

The following section presents the findings of the analysis of the webscraped data in terms of the emotions and patterns of participation expressed on social media posts. As outlined above, based on the focus group data we trained supervised classifiers, for the groups of average, committed, and disconnected citizens, their emotions, and patterns of participation. The section will present the results per group. Furthermore, where relevant we also highlight country-specific findings.



Table 5-8 Overview of main emotions by group in percentages (Kristina Weissenbach, Ruth Berkowitz, Daniel Gayo-Avello, Felix-Christopher von Nostitz)

Average Citizens (N=29)		Committed Citizens (N=183)		Disconnected Citizens (N=14,000)	
Efficacy	58,7%	Political_interest	44,0%	Dissatisfaction	94,3%
Pointlessness	23,8%	Awareness	37,5%	Distance	1,7%
Solidarity	8,9%	Efficacy	15,0%	Self-interest	1,2%
Sense_of_duty	8,5%	Satisfaction	3,3%	Disinterest	1,1%
		Sense_of_duty	0,2%	Dishonesty	1,0%
				Efficacy	0,5%
				Pointlessness	0,3%

Average Semantic Group

As we can see in **table 5.8**, for the average group the main emotions expressed on social media are 'efficacy' followed by 'pointlessness'. Interestingly 'sense of duty' - evoked as a main reason to engage in politics, especially for more conventional forms such as voting, in the focus groups - is mentioned in less than 10 percent of the posts. This is further supported when we combine emotional triggers and motivations with calls for action in the seed accounts (**Table 5.9**). We can see that posts in the average group that express a sense of duty are never linked to calls for voting by seed accounts. However, calls for voting are linked to the feeling of 'efficacy' in 25 cases, but also to 'pointlessness' in 5 others. Furthermore, 'efficacy' in the average group seems to be attached to calls for attending meetings. Overall, we can see that while the average group expresses a lot of emotions, these are hardly ever connected to calls for political engagement. In addition, results linking emotions and calls for political engagement in the average group can only be found in the German case (see appendix chapter 5 **Table 5.12-5.15**). In none of the other cases do we find these two elements mentioned together. This points to the importance of taking into consideration country factors even when looking at online data.

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Table 5-9 Frequency of calls for action and triggers/motivations for the average semantic group

GROUP	CALL FOR ACTION	TRIGGER/MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY
Average	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	AVERAGE_EFFICACY	4
Average	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_EFFICACY	940
Average	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_POINTLESSNESS	186
Average	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_SENSE_OF_DUTY	38
Average	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_SOLIDARITY	173
Average	VOTING_ELECTING	AVERAGE_EFFICACY	25



Average	VOTING_ELECTING	AVERAGE_POINTLESSNESS	5
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Committed Semantic Group

Concerning the committed group, as we can see in **table 5.8** the main motivations and emotions expressed were 'political interest' followed by 'awareness'. This is not surprising given what we know from the classical participation literature, i.e. that most of the time political activism can be explained by interest in politics and political awareness. In contrast to the average group, 'efficacy' is not often mentioned, which may point to the fact that for the committed group the focus is not only on the outcome but also on the process of political participation. This is further reflected in the barely mentioned motivation of 'sense of duty'. Interestingly, only around three percent of tweets mention the emotion of satisfaction. It could be that exactly this feeling of being dissatisfied encourages political participation and to follow calls for action by the supply side in the committed group.

When we look at **Table 5.10** combining the calls for action by the supply side with the triggers and emotions for political participation among citizens, we can again see that the committed group expresses a lot of different emotions and motivations, but these are rarely linked to calls for action. We can only find two cases. First, expressing 'awareness' is linked to calls for attending meetings or events. Second 'awareness' is also linked to calls for voting. This is again in contrast to the average group that links these two calls of action to emotions and motivations of 'efficacy'. In terms of country differences, we can see that 'awareness' is the most frequently mentioned motivation linked to calls for action by the supply side in three of the four countries (see appendix chapter 4 **Table 5.12-5.15**). In the Greek case, we do not find any cases of committed nor average group emotional reactions to any calls for action by the seed accounts. This again points to national differences. Further it might require further fine tuning of the method used (recalling as we do in chapter 3 that the sample did not yield many calls for unconventional or contentious action). One key point to keep in mind here is that we only manually checked the tweets in German, and translated the matching posts into the remaining languages, which could also lead to "better" results in Germany. Future research should hand code examples in the other languages too to further improve the results.

Table 5-10 Frequency of calls for action and triggers/motivations for the committed semantic group

GROUP	CALL FOR ACTION	TRIGGER/MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY
Committed	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	3
Committed	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	1576
Committed	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_EFFICACY	46
Committed	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_POLITICAL_INTEREST	225
Committed	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_SATISFACTION	36



Committed	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_SENSE_OF_DUTY	1
Committed	VOTING_ELECTING	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	2

Disconnected Semantic Group

Last, we look at the disconnected group. Unsurprisingly, the most identified emotion is 'dissatisfaction' with 93.3 percent. Between two and one percent we also find triggers and emotions such as 'distance', 'disinterest' and 'dishonesty'. All are in line with the semantic group of the disconnected and are not mentioned by the other two groups. Further, while 'pointlessness' is mentioned by the disconnected and average citizen group, in the former this is the case in just 0.3 percent compared to 23.8 percent in the latter. This may point to a much more resigned and passive mode of political participation among the average citizen group compared to the disconnected one. The average citizen group also stresses the emotion/motivation of 'efficacy', while the disconnected group does so hardly ever. Thus overall, the disconnected group might be dissatisfied not because they see participation as pointless but maybe more because they see the current or more conventional forms of participation as ineffective and a link them with feelings of lack of efficacy. This could point to more participation in unconventional forms by the disconnected group compared to a higher use of conventional forms like voting among the average group as discussed above. These contrasting findings about clear motivational and emotional differences in relation to political participation between these two semantic groups at least partially support the validity and usefulness of our approach.

When we look at the results connecting calls for actions in the seed accounts with triggers and motivations (**table 5.11**), we can see that for the disconnected group the call to attend meetings or events is most frequently met by the emotion of 'dissatisfaction' followed by 'disinterest'. These results can be understood in two different ways. First, members of the disconnected group express that they are not interested in attending political meetings and events advertised by the seed accounts as they are dissatisfied with any meeting in general. Or second, they are dissatisfied with the specific political events and meetings mentioned in the seed post and call for other and alternative events and meetings. This second option seems to fit better with the data, as many more express the emotion of 'dissatisfaction' with regard to the calls for action compared to 'disinterested'. The general high level for 'dishonesty' and low score for 'efficacy' in this group, as already mentioned above, supports this second reading further.

Next, we find a sizeable number of posts connecting very negative emotions and motivations of 'dissatisfaction' with calls for voting. Again, this could imply that these posts express a general dissatisfaction with calls for voting. This could suggest that they prefer other types of political actions. However, the largest group among the disconnected group are those posts expressing 'dissatisfaction' in reaction to posts by the supply side, even if they do not mention any call for action. This points to a very passive and truly disconnected core group in this community. In addition, 'dissatisfaction' is also the most expressed motivation and emotion across all four countries in reactions to calls for action. Last, the connection between 'dissatisfaction' and both calls for voting and attending meetings is visible in Czechia, France, and Germany, but not in Greece (see appendix chapter 4 **Table 5.12-5.15**). We find the disconnected group on X in all countries, and it is the largest group of the three, which could be due to the general user profile of this social media platform: dissatisfied citizens.



Table 5-11 Frequency of calls for action and triggers/motivations for the disconnected and off-topic semantic groups

GROUP	CALL FOR ACTION	TRIGGER/MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY
Disconnected	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	2
Disconnected	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	180
Disconnected	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISHONESTY	174
Disconnected	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	505
Disconnected	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	77206
Disconnected	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISTANCE	1
Disconnected	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_EFFICACY	42
Disconnected	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_POINTLESSNESS	137
Disconnected	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_SELF-INTEREST	247
Disconnected	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	1
Disconnected	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	217
Disconnected	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_SELF-INTEREST	5

5.6 Conclusion: Emotion/Trigger-Participation Patterns

In conclusion, this chapter further highlights the conceptual value of incorporating perceptual aspects, emotions, and triggers to better understand citizen participation behaviour and the role of participatory trust. This can inform strategies to foster greater civic engagement and trust. Methodologically, the use of focus groups and web scraping proved effective. Future research should further explore the approach to combine these two sets of very different yet complementary data sources. Empirically, we found that disconnected citizens are particularly vocal in online spaces when discussing participatory trust, and the demand side is more prominent than the supply side (less calls for actions). These findings suggest that policymakers need to address the concerns of disengaged citizens and amplify calls to action to encourage participation. Notably, we identified distinct emotion/trigger-participation patterns across the four countries: the online average group emphasised efficacy; the online committed group showed political



interest, and the online disconnected group expressed dissatisfaction. The emphasis on efficacy among the average and committed groups, and political interest among the committed group, suggests that enhancing citizens' sense of efficacy and political interest could be key to increasing engagement and trust. Overall, we identified distinct emotion/trigger-participation patterns across different countries, which highlights the need for tailored approaches in fostering participatory trust. Understanding these patterns can help in designing more effective engagement strategies that resonate with specific cultural contexts. Overall, these implications can guide future research and policy-makers strategies to better understand and enhance citizen participation and trust in various environments.

5.7 Appendix to Chapter 5

This appendix contains the tables relating to the Call for Action and the feelings expressed in each country.

Table 5-12 Semantic Communities and Emotions in Czechia

GROUP	CALL FOR ACTION	TRIGGER/MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY
AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_SOLIDARITY	1
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	3
DISCONNECTED	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	3
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	5
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	6803
DISCONNECTED	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	11
OFF_TOPIC	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	OFF_TOPIC	3
OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	3147

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Table 5-13 Semantic Communities and Emotions in France

GROUP	CALL FOR ACTION	TRIGGER/MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY
AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_EFFICACY	84
AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_POINTLESSNESS	3
AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_SOLIDARITY	28



COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	20
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_EFFICACY	3
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_POLITICAL_INTEREST	9
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_SATISFACTION	1
DISCONNECTED	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	44
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISHONESTY	19
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	61
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	19393
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_EFFICACY	1
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_SELF-INTEREST	7
DISCONNECTED	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	1
DISCONNECTED	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	52
OFF_TOPIC	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	OFF_TOPIC	47
OFF_TOPIC	CONTACTING_POLITICIANS_OR_INSTITUTIONS	OFF_TOPIC	1
OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	19404
OFF_TOPIC	VOTING_ELECTING	OFF_TOPIC	109

Table 5-14 Semantic Communities and Emotions in Germany

GROUP	CALL FOR ACTION	TRIGGER/MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY
AVERAGE	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	AVERAGE_EFFICACY	4
AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_EFFICACY	856
AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_POINTLESSNESS	183



AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_SENSE_OF_DUTY	38
AVERAGE	OFF_TOPIC	AVERAGE_SOLIDARITY	144
AVERAGE	VOTING_ELECTING	AVERAGE_EFFICACY	25
AVERAGE	VOTING_ELECTING	AVERAGE_POINTLESSNESS	5
COMMITTED	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	3
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	1553
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_EFFICACY	43
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_POLITICAL_INTEREST	216
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_SATISFACTION	35
COMMITTED	OFF_TOPIC	COMMITTED_SENSE_OF_DUTY	1
COMMITTED	VOTING_ELECTING	COMMITTED_AWARENESS	2
DISCONNECTED	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	2
DISCONNECTED	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	133
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISHONESTY	155
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	438
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	50852
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISTANCE	1
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_EFFICACY	41
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_POINTLESSNESS	137
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_SELF_INTEREST	240
DISCONNECTED	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	154



DISCONNECTED	VOTING_ELECTING	DISCONNECTED_SELF-INTEREST	5
OFF_TOPIC	ATTENDING_MEETINGS_OR_EVENTS	OFF_TOPIC	153
OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	50170
OFF_TOPIC	VOTING_ELECTING	OFF_TOPIC	265

Table 5-15 Semantic Communities and Emotions in Greece

GROUP	CALL FOR ACTION	TRIGGER/MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISINTEREST	1
DISCONNECTED	OFF_TOPIC	DISCONNECTED_DISSATISFACTION	158
OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	OFF_TOPIC	111

6 Conclusions

Louisa Parks

The relationship between political trust and citizens' decisions to engage in political participation is complex and multifaceted. Political trust can be influenced by various factors including belonging to different groups, including broader socio-demographic groups and affiliations with groups based on political beliefs. The links between political trust and political participation can be catalysed through different perceptions and emotions. Shifting the focus from earlier work in the ActEU project work package 3 on participation, this report emphasises the collective side of political participation and the role of political trust and distrust in shaping changing participation patterns. It follows innovative and exploratory approaches, utilising existing survey data, the ActEU focus group data, and the ActEU web-scraped data from X to investigate these questions from novel angles. It sheds light on how political trust acts as an intervening variable in political participation choices in light of different affiliations at the collective levels and with reference to a range of different types of political participation from more to less conventional.

The existing literature on political participation and political trust suggests that understanding political participation in a broad sense, encompassing all collective behaviour intended to influence political decisions and institutions, is key to gaining a complete picture of the interactions between the two. It also indicates that longstanding links between certain types of political participation and actors, such as strikes and trade unions or political parties and voting, are evolving and shifting. Existing literature on collective and individual identity and emotions and political behaviour suggests that to explore how trust is linked to participation attention to these factors can also be key. In this report we take up these challenges, discussing different groups in society, different political affiliations, and different perceptions and emotions, to shed light on the nuanced



relationships between trust and action. To provide new evidence, we focus on both the supply side of collective actors seeking to mobilize citizens into political participation and, to a lesser extent, on the demand side. We introduce the novel concept of participatory trust to link political trust and distrust to forms of participation via attention to both behaviour and perceptions.

The empirical chapters offer some valuable insights into various aspects of this topic. Analysis of existing survey data, which focuses on levels of political trust, updates our knowledge about the links between socio-demographic groups and political participation. For voting, the analysis suggests that older and higher social class individuals are more likely to have voted in previous national elections, while younger and lower social class respondents showed a higher tendency not to vote. Low political trust generally rendered these patterns more pronounced, contributing to lower voter turnout among these groups. Regarding legal demonstrations, respondents under 30 were less likely to participate, particularly those with low political trust, contrary to common associations of youth with protesting. Participation in unlawful demonstrations appears gendered, with those identifying as male, along with those declaring unemployment and high education levels, more likely to take part. Low political trust exaggerated these trends, suggesting it drives more contentious political participation. However, the changing definitions of lawful protest in Europe must be considered, as they can affect participation trends and political trust levels.

Our exploratory approach to the web-scraped data from X examines whether different political actors accounted for in the data collection match with certain forms of political participation, and the role of political trust and distrust in that relationship. Here the annotations of the web-scraped data measure political trust and political distrust as discrete categories rather than equating low trust with distrust. Our analysis, based on a limited set of data composed of calls for political action identified in the broader web-scraped data from X, reveals that more contentious actors either do not post calls for action on X or have moved away from this platform. Thus, it is worth noting that further research on data from other platforms contained in the ActEU dataset, or alternative strategies to examine the X data for example by topic modelling around certain prominent demonstrations, strikes and more, may be more revealing about more contentious forms of participation.

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On more institutional actors and action, the analysis suggests that politicians and political parties are more likely to call for voting/electing and participation in meetings or events. Interest groups and unions are more likely to call for action in the form of contacting politicians and institutions. Media actors also appeared in our sample as slightly associated with calls for voting/electing, which may well be linked to the timing of the web-scraping around the European elections. When considering political trust and distrust annotations for these tweets by political actors, these patterns persist. However, our limited data from those responding to these calls for action – the demand side of political participation – suggest that political distrust breaks this pattern. This finding is also reflected in a first qualitative exploration of responses to calls for action. Though tentative, it appears that political distrust is a source for changing patterns of participation, shifting them from their expected and established directions amongst those responding to more mainstream and less contentious political actors. Further research on the role of political distrust in the lowering of conventional or more institutional political participation could be a fruitful avenue to develop this finding and test whether this pattern translates into political apathy and disengagement, or into a move to different forms of political participation, for whom.

In the final empirical chapter of the report, we consider the under-studied area of how emotions are linked to political trust and political participation choices. We first consider findings emerging from the ActEU focus groups data and then develop an innovative approach to link the emotions emerging as key to focus group participants' participation choices and feelings of trust to the ActEU



web-scraped data from X. The chapter outlines some interesting findings about average, committed, and disconnected groups of citizens considering their levels of political engagement. The chapter underscores that the average group of citizens primarily expresses emotions of 'efficacy' and 'pointlessness' about political participation on X. Interestingly, the 'sense of duty,' which is a significant motivator for conventional political participation in focus groups, is rarely mentioned in online discussions. Calls for voting are often linked to feelings of 'efficacy,' but also to 'pointlessness,' indicating a mixed perception of voting as both impactful and futile. Overall, the average group expresses a variety of emotions, but these are seldom connected to calls for political engagement, except in Germany. This highlights the importance of considering country-specific factors even when analysing online data.

For the committed group, the main motivations and emotions expressed around participation on X are 'political interest' and 'awareness.' Unlike the average group, 'efficacy' is less frequently mentioned, suggesting that the committed group values the process of political participation as much as the outcome. The 'sense of duty' is barely mentioned, and feelings of 'satisfaction' are rarely expressed, which may imply that dissatisfaction drives political participation. The committed group expresses a range of emotions and motivations, but these are rarely linked to calls for action, except for 'awareness,' which is connected to attending meetings or voting. National differences are evident, with better results in Germany due to the manual checking of tweets. This points to the need for further methodological refinement, including hand-coding examples in multiple languages to improve results. The disconnected group on X is by far the most important, and characterised by high levels of 'dissatisfaction,' followed by emotions such as 'distance,' 'disinterest,' and 'dishonesty.' 'Pointlessness' is mentioned much less frequently compared to the average group, indicating a more resigned and passive mode of political participation. The disconnected group rarely expresses 'efficacy,' suggesting that they view conventional participation forms as ineffective. Calls to attend meetings or events are met with 'dissatisfaction' and 'disinterest,' which could imply a general dissatisfaction with the advertised political events or a preference for alternative political actions. The high level of 'dishonesty' and low scores for 'efficacy' support this interpretation. Dissatisfaction is the most expressed emotion across all countries, except in Greece, highlighting the need for tailored engagement strategies.

Comparing these findings to those that emerge from the analysis of focus groups reveals some differences. Most notably, in focus group discussions of all groups' efficacy evaluations were very important regarding views on political participation types – protest in particular is seen as efficient by more engaged citizens. All citizens also discuss the sense of duty in connection with voting, with this overriding efficacy evaluations in many cases. This suggests when citizens express themselves independently on X we see more negative emotions than we do in focus groups, where citizens are asked to actively reflect and react to one another's ideas face to face.

Our report also points to several policy recommendations, outlined in more detail in the opening executive summary. First, findings on political distrust and its role in galvanising participation in demonstrations as well as findings on low political trust affecting conventional participation for younger and working-class citizens in Europe suggests the need for tolerant approaches to peaceful protest in order to protect political participation rights as well as the need for programmes addressing political distrust. The ActEU toolkit will prove a useful resource in this view. Second, the work on emotions points to the usefulness of targeted engagement on X for political actors who wish to engage with disconnected citizens. The focus group analysis, on the other hand, suggests the importance of face-to-face engagement to drive deeper reflections. This points to the importance of creating innovative democratic participation spaces at all levels of political decision-making, such as citizens' assemblies and other spaces for debate and exchange.



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About ActEU

How can we conceptualise 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, behavior 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 maximise 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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