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Exploring the Impact of Political Efficacy on Local Political Participation: Evidence From the Netherlands

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BSc Political Science – International Relations and Organisations

Bachelor Thesis



**Exploring the Impact of Political Efficacy on Local Political Participation: Evidence
From the Netherlands**

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Introduction

Political participation is critical for the vitality of democratic societies. Participation in election allows citizens to select representatives, ensuring diverse representation in the political arena. It empowers citizens to reward or punish officials based on their political performance (De Vries et al., 2013). Furthermore, by engaging in advocacy groups or participating in political organizations, citizens can influence the direction and priorities of political officials (Brady et al., 1995). Participation in political and civic activities also creates a sense of belonging and community as it brings citizens together around shared goals and values and lowers the likelihood of social conflict (Schwarz, 2002). Extensive academic research has investigated aspects and determinants of political participation, employing several methodologies and theoretical approaches (Rusk, 1976; Brady et al., 1995; McDonnell, 2020). Something called political efficacy – the confidence of citizens in their ability to influence and understand politics – is a key indicator of political participation. Studies have shown that higher levels of political efficacy cause higher chances of engagement in political activities such as voting, political activism, and volunteering (Pons & Liegey, 2019; Tambe, 2021). The key takeaway from these findings is that political efficacy can boost citizens' determination to overcome obstacles, which makes it easier for them to get involved in politics.

Despite evidence indicating that citizens feel a closer connection to elected officials and decision-making at the *local* level, there has been insufficient scholarly focus on exploring political efficacy and participation in local contexts (Genieys et al., 2004). To address this gap in research, further exploration is needed. The proximity may enhance the effect of political efficacy on political participation by creating a sense of political empowerment, leading to an increased likelihood of citizens actively contributing to local political processes. As the number of policies made on the local level is generally large, it would be interesting to uncover when people participate and thereby influence the political officials that make these local policies. Furthermore, there exists a notable gap in research specifically addressing the Dutch context.

This is concerning considering the historic decline in voter turnout during the 2022 local elections in the Netherlands, as reported by Ipsos (2022).

Taken together, it is of importance to shift the perspective and to explore the dynamics of political participation beyond the scope of national politics. To do so, the following research question will be examined: *Does political efficacy positively predict participation at the local level?* The thesis provides insights into the levels of political participation in local politics and hopes to make a meaningful contribution to the broader discourse on political participation and political efficacy as well as to our understanding of local democratic functioning. Drawing from research on political participation and rational choice theory, the thesis argues that political efficacy (both internal and external) is positively correlated to local political participation. Significant support in favor of both hypotheses was found, demonstrating that higher levels of local political efficacy are related to higher levels of local political participation.

After defining the concepts of political participation and political efficacy, a review of theory and previous research on the interaction between the two concepts is provided. This will lead to two hypotheses. The research design operationalizes the variables and defines the dataset and methods that have been employed. To test the hypotheses, the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) Local Voters Survey 2022 serves as the main dataset. To account for missing information on demographics, the dataset has been merged with the LISS March 2022 Background Variables dataset. The Local Voter Survey allows for an examination of efficacy at the local level as it contains efficacy measures directly related to local politics. Lastly, the results will be analyzed and a discussion of limitations as well as implications for future research will be provided.

The Multifaceted Concept of Political Participation

Before the literature is reviewed, it is beneficial to establish a clear understanding of

the concept of political participation. The concept of political participation is generally understood as the active participation of citizens in political activities with the goal of influencing the government (Verba & Nie, 1972; Brady & Schlozman, 2022). According to Brady and Schlozman (2022), it captures a wide range of behaviors that citizens might use to contribute to the functioning of democratic systems. The authors demonstrate that these behaviors can range from voting, and contacting officials, to protesting. This list serves as illustrative rather than exhaustive, as other behaviors also fall under political participation. The literature highlights distinctions between institutionalized political participation and non-institutionalized participation (Li & Yu, 2023; Marien et al., 2010). A more common distinction is that of electoral and civic participation (McDonnell, 2020; Tambe, 2021; Pons & Liegey, 2019; Dacombe, 2017; Rebell, 2018). Electoral participation involves behaviors such as voting in elections, engaging with political candidates, and engaging in campaigns. On the other hand, civic participation involves behavior such as doing community service, attending city council meetings, and involvement in initiatives related to local development.

The thesis emphasizes electoral participation considering its central role in the democratic process (Brady et al., 1995). McDonnell (2020) argues that the most effective framework for examining the relationship between external political efficacy and political participation is electoral participation. This perspective suggests that the impact of political efficacy on civic participation may be constrained by its inherent connection to formal political procedures. Moreover, electoral participation is widely regarded as a key democratic indicator (Kearton, 2022). As the goal of the thesis is to contribute to the understanding of democratic functioning, electoral participation stands out as the appropriate indicator. Furthermore, electoral participation offers a quantifiable indicator, allowing for a systematic analysis of the hypothesis. The emphasis on electoral participation does not dismiss the quantifiability of non-electoral participation – such as civic participation. Rather, it focuses on a specific aspect of

participation that is considered to be crucial for measuring democratic health and is directly tied to political efficacy in formal political processes.

Rational Choice Theory

Scholars have frequently returned to rational choice theory (RCT) as a theoretical explanation for political participation (Verba & Nie, 1972; Brady et al., 1995). This is mostly because RCT models possess analytical precision and explanatory power (Whiteley, 2022). According to this theory, individuals, acting as rational actors, exhibit behavior guided by specific intentions and goals through which they seek to maximize their utility within their limits (Downs, 1957). In the context of political participation, rational choice theory holds that citizens tend to participate when the benefits outweigh the costs. Consequently, political participation can be linked to factors that increase the perceived benefits, such as improved employment prospects or direct financial rewards – though the latter may be more prevalent in countries characterized by higher levels of corruption (Brady et al., 1995). On the cost side, factors such as easy access to participation venues or simplified registration procedures, reduce the perceived costs associated with political participation as they minimize the time commitment required for participation (Downs, 1957; Colomer, 1991).

Research has, nevertheless, witnessed a notable shift away from RCT, with several authors criticizing its ability to explain political participation. This shift can be attributed to different conceptualizations of utility. Utility is historically defined as a measure of satisfaction or happiness with the chosen course of action (Bentham & Harrison, 1967). However, results seem to differ when depending on either a ‘thin’ or ‘thick’ understanding of utility. A thin conception of utility simplifies the decision-making process by assuming that individuals possess consistent and stable preferences that can be quantified and optimized. The work of Downs (1957) on the ‘paradox of voting’ highlights the limitations of relying on a thin utility concept for accurately predicting political participation. Downs identifies a paradox wherein an

individual's rational decision to vote contrasts with the insignificant influence that a singular vote has on them personally. In light of the costs exceeding the benefits, a rational individual would logically opt not to participate in voting.

The fact that a considerable number of people still choose to vote implies that, from a rational standpoint based on a thin concept of utility, most individuals may be deemed irrational. To account for this rationality, Riker and Ordeshook (1968) developed a new utility hypothesis. They consider utility to be equal to the “different benefits a voter receives from the success of his preferred candidate over his less preferred one *times* the probability that the citizen will, by voting, bring about the benefit *minus* the cost to the individual of the act of voting” (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968, p. 25). In line with this, Renshon (1974) suggests that individuals are not mere rational actors making calculated assessments of their political influence but are driven by deeper, psychological motivations. Research on mobilization efforts indicates that external factors, especially those performed by mobilizing agents such as political parties and institutions, can affect cost-benefit calculations. Consequently, citizens engagement in political participation is affected (Bridgman & Stolle, 2022; Adesanmi, 2023). Taken together, these studies present a wider range of factors compared to those that are focused on in a narrow conception of utility, which typically revolves around material profits or losses in terms of money and time. Therefore, a thick conception of utility can be referred to as a broad understanding of utility that considers a wide range of factors, preferences, and considerations that citizens may have when making their decisions.

The presented review demonstrates that authors within the rational choice school have been forced to include non-materialistic factors to explain political participation within the rational framework. The question this leaves us with is: How do these non-materialistic factors affect utility calculations? Factors that enhance the perceived benefits, including political knowledge, trust, and civic duty are related to political participation (Wang, 2015; McDonnell,

2020; Chen et al., 2019). When citizens have a sophisticated understanding of political processes, they are more likely to view political participation as a worthwhile activity. Alternatively, civic duty makes people feel responsible and committed. This contributes to an informed and capable electorate which maximizes benefits. Sociodemographic factors, including age, income, and education, can also affect these dynamics. Age, for instance, has an impact on one's level of political participation, income may have an impact on perceived costs, and education may have an impact on how citizens assess the overall benefits of political participation (Brady & Schlozman, 2022).

To conclude, different conceptualizations of utility affect the ability of rational choice theory to explain political participation. Applying RCT with a thin conception leads to a limited and potentially inaccurate understanding of political participation. This does not imply that rational choice theory should no longer be used as a theory of political participation. Rather, it should function as a normative explanation that can help to explain certain strategies citizens choose when they participate to influence politics (Whiteley, 2022). Taking this literature review into consideration, the thesis acknowledges the potential limitations of rational choice theory based on a thin concept of utility and recognizes the importance of a more comprehensive understanding of utility that accounts for the complexities of citizen's behavior. The following section conceptualizes political efficacy and reveals the potential influence of efficacy on political participation.

Political Efficacy and Political Participation

Political efficacy refers to a person's confidence in their ability to influence and understand political processes and outcomes (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Ostrander et al., 2021). It covers not only the knowledge of political systems and procedures but also the emotional investment and drive to take an active role in politics. Political efficacy involves both internal and external efficacy. Internal efficacy reflects individuals' belief in their

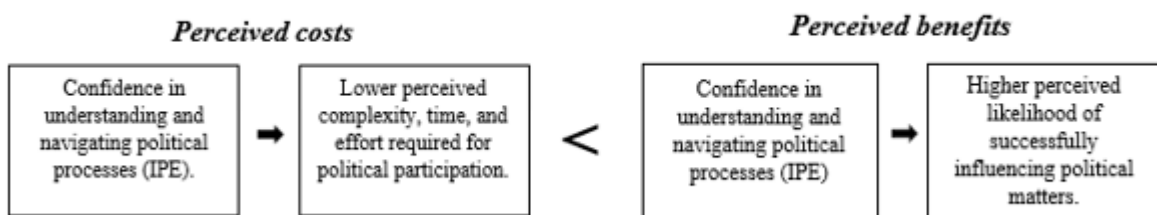
understanding *of* and participation *in* politics. Internal efficacy is not the same as political knowledge as the latter refers to possessing accurate information and an understanding of how the political system and process operates. As such political knowledge is often measured through questions such as naming representatives, parties with the most seats in parliament, or determining party positions on major political issues (Carpini & Keeter, 1993; Reichert, 2016). In contrast, internal political efficacy is a psychological concept that refers to citizen's perception of their role within the political process and system. External political efficacy reflects individuals' beliefs in the responsiveness and effectiveness of political institutions. It differs substantially from political trust which is the trust in the integrity, reliability, and competence of political institutions (Li & Yu, 2023).

Given that political efficacy reflects individuals' motivation and perceptions of the political system, numerous researchers have used it as an explanatory tool for political participation. For instance, Ostrander et al. find (2021) find that high levels of political efficacy are associated with increased political participation whereas low levels of efficacy are associated with political disengagement. Additionally, both dimensions of political efficacy have been found to play a distinct yet interconnected role in shaping citizens' willingness to participate in political activities (Pollock, 1983; Xena, 2015). To understand the rationale of these findings the following section will apply the theoretical framework of rational choice theory.

Internal Political Efficacy

Considering the discussion presented above, the thesis predicts that higher levels of internal political efficacy will lead to maximized utility. Higher levels of internal political efficacy correspond to an increased likelihood that citizens will believe in their capacity to understand and influence political processes (Reichert, 2016). On the one hand, this reduces the costs of political participation as one's confidence in understanding and navigating political

processes would reduce the perceived complexity, time, and effort required for political participation. Lower costs would then make political participation more appealing. On the other hand, higher levels of internal political efficacy would increase the perceived benefits of political participation. To clarify, consideration is given to the case of a citizen, referred to as X. In line with the conceptualization of this thesis, the goal of political participation is to influence government. Within the framework of rational choice theory and political participation, the effectiveness of X's participation is perceived as a benefit. This perception is directly linked to X's level of internal political efficacy. Higher levels of internal political efficacy mean that X has a greater sense of confidence to understand and *influence* political issues, which maximizes perceived benefits. Reversing this logic; when X lacks confidence (indicated by low levels of internal political efficacy), the perceived benefits of political



participation would consequently decline. Figure 1 demonstrates the line of thought.

Figure 1: A demonstration of the potential effects of internal political efficacy on the utility calculation.

Several authors have found that political participation is in fact positively influenced by internal political efficacy (Hayes & Bean, 1993; Zúñiga et al., 2017; Mead, 2018). Moeller et al. (2014) suggest that if young citizens are socialized in a manner that fosters a sense of *competence* when they have to make electoral decisions, they are more likely to participate politically. This finding is in line with the argument that higher perceived levels of competence and knowledge to influence politics lead to an increase in political participation. Nonetheless, the relationship between internal political efficacy and political participation has been subject to debate. Harff and Schmuck's (2023) research introduces an interesting perspective, as they

do *not* identify a relationship between internal political efficacy and political participation. This might be attributed to their focus on the effect of influencers on the internal political efficacy and political participation of youth. The authors propose that the absence of a positive relation could stem from influencers who only temporarily mobilize young people. In the context of the theoretical framework, this implies that internal political efficacy is constructed in a manner that does not maximize utility. The key takeaway from this finding is therefore that any impact on internal political efficacy should ensure that citizens are made aware of its ability to improve benefits and reduce costs of political participation.

External Political Efficacy

Following the same logic as before the thesis predicts that higher levels of external political efficacy will lead to maximized utility. High levels of external political efficacy translate to an increase in the likelihood that a citizen will believe the government to be responsive to their demands. To start, citizens with higher levels of external efficacy are more likely to perceive lower costs associated with participation. Believing in the power of institutions can help lower participation-related skepticism and uncertainties, making participation seem more doable and less costly. If a citizen considers a government to be unresponsive to their demands, the benefits will become smaller and outweighed by the costs. Building on the theoretical framework presented, this leads to lower participation in politics. Again, the figure below demonstrates this line of thought.

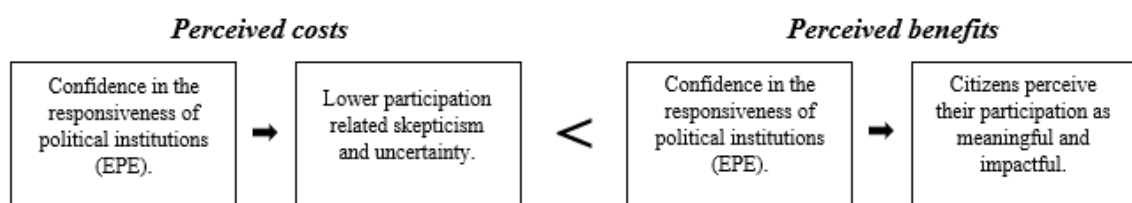


Figure 2: A demonstration of the potential effects of internal political efficacy on the utility calculation.

The findings of Li and Yu (2022) align with this argument about external political

efficacy. They find that citizens with lower levels of external political efficacy believe that their ability to influence formal institutions is limited, which then leads them to prefer non-institutionalized forms of participation. In other words, when citizens do not feel like political institutions are responsive to their needs, political participation in terms of these institutions can be equated to higher costs. Again, the results regarding the impact of external political efficacy on political participation show inconsistency across academic research. Zuniga et al. (2017), for example, find that external efficacy had no direct effect on political participation while Mead (2018) finds that external efficacy does in fact influence political participation. The divergence in their findings arises because the first authors measure political participation as a combination of various participation types, while the latter measures direct forms of participation such as voting.

Renshon (1974) makes no clear distinction between internal and external political efficacy and focusses on non-institutional participation. Instead of making a clear distinction, he adopts a ‘need theory of political efficacy’. In essence, he conceptualizes political efficacy as the belief that one has enough personal control over political processes to satisfy the demand for influence in important areas of life (p.75). The desire for personal control then serves as a motivational force that drives citizens to pursue political participation. Based on his theory, we would expect that the limited perception of one’s ability to influence political institutions reflects one’s dissatisfaction with the perceived control over their individual environment. Initially, his conceptualization of political efficacy seems to align with the presented evidence on the effect of both internal and external political efficacy on political participation. Individuals who think they have little power over official institutions may look for other ways to get involved – as Li and Yu (2022) suggested – that align with their desire for control. However, Renshon (1974) found that citizens with high political efficacy tend to participate

less frequent. Hence, the contradictory finding can be attributed to the different conceptualization of political efficacy and political participation.

Local versus National Politics

The majority of the discussed research centers around political efficacy and participation at the *national* level. The thesis argued that studying this relationship on the local level would be valuable. Local politics is often perceived as more accessible and responsive to the needs of the community while national politics seem less receptive to individual concerns because of the larger distance (Genieys et al., 2004; McDonnell, 2020). According to Castenmiller (1994), this proximity enables local political actors to have a deeper understanding of citizens' political attitudes, behaviors, and desires. In addition to being geographically close, this proximity also refers to how much easier it is to contact local government as opposed to national government. Local governments, for instance, facilitate democratic forums such as public input sessions which encourage dialogue and thereby establish an atmosphere of local participation (Morlan, 1984; Dekker & den Ridder, 2017). However, Fuller (2023) states that – though in a virtual setting – digital democracy and online forums allow citizens to express their views and take part in national dialogues. One could argue that technology and communication developments could partially solve the proximity problem by providing platforms for participation at the national level. In terms of electoral participation, digital democracy has not been widely adopted by governments (Contucci et al., 2019; Fuller 2023). Therefore, the greater distance between citizens and the national government remains and will be examined as such.

In addition, considering countries with decentralized systems, a diverse number of policies is formulated within local governments (Dekker & Den Ridder, 2017). Of course, the autonomy and ability of local governments to make decisions are affected by national laws, policies, and regulations. While the national government sets the overarching framework in which local governments operate, it is at the local level where policies that reflect the nuanced

needs of communities are mostly created (Mortensen et al., 2022). With a given amount of authority, local governments engage in policy-making that covers a wide range of topics, such as social welfare, urban development, and public health. The daily lives of community members are directly impacted by these local policies. For example, zoning restrictions impact how areas look, school policies influence how kids learn, and health policies control access to essential healthcare services. Thus, examining the motivation for local political participation will inform our understanding of the attempts by community members to influence political direction.

The local context offers new aspects that could influence utility calculations. To start, because local political actors are seen as closer and more responsive to the community needs, citizens may perceive their political participation as more impactful. Local democratic forums and public sessions, for example, create a direct link between citizens and local government, increasing the perception that political institutions are responsive to your demands. As argued before, this tends to lead to less participation-related skepticism and lower perceived costs of participation. Critically, Dekker and den Ridder (2017) propose that participation at the local level may not solely be driven by the sole goal of influencing government decisions. Instead, they note that habit or mutual expectations among members of the local community could influence participation in local politics.

Although the mutual expectations among community members may lessen the requirement for higher levels of efficacy, the fact that a great number of policies are barely exposed in mainstream media sources creates a puzzle. In theory, more policies mean there is more to think about in terms of the cost-benefit calculation. The problem here is that there is not enough information available about these local issues. How do citizens then stay informed and make decisions when they deal with local politics? If there is an information gap with regard to local politics, citizens may need to rely on their own confidence and belief that they can understand and be part of local politics (i.e., internal political efficacy). On the other hand, the

proximity might resolve the lack of information by emphasizing the feeling that the government is responsive to your demands, i.e. external political efficacy (McDonnell, 2020). These findings demonstrate the nuanced role political efficacy might play on the local level.

In conclusion, a significant gap exists in the predominant focus on national-level participation rather than local-level participation. Local-level dynamics introduce new considerations for the relationship between political efficacy and political participation. This thesis acknowledges the distinction between internal and external political efficacy and as such focuses on both dimensions separately. Based on the literature review and the acknowledgment that local politics are perceived as more responsive to community needs but may require higher levels of efficacy due to a lack of information, this thesis presents a new perspective. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Local internal political efficacy is positively related to local political participation.

H2: Local external political efficacy is positively related to local political participation.

Research Design

Case Selection

This thesis focuses on local electoral participation in the Netherlands. The political climate of the Netherlands is characterized by a proportional representation system which divides up the number of seats according to the proportion of votes that each political party gets. The system is unique in the way that it allows smaller parties to obtain representation whereas in majoritarian systems smaller parties often struggle to secure seats in the legislature. This could encourage people who support smaller parties to vote because they know that their vote can have a meaningful impact in the form of representation in the legislation. Furthermore, the decentralized political system in the Netherlands also emphasizes the importance of local political engagement, making it an ideal setting to bridge the gap in the literature regarding local-level political participation and efficacy.

Data

Data from the LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences) panel administered by Centerdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands) is used. The LISS panel is a sample of Dutch citizens who participate in internet surveys. Citizens have been picked based on a true probability sample of the Dutch people. To ensure inclusivity, households without the means to participate are equipped with a computer (Scherpenzeel & Das, 2010). For the empirical analysis of the relationship between local political efficacy and local political participation, this thesis employs data from the LISS Local Voters Survey 2022. The LISS Local Voters Survey is a comprehensive dataset that is designed to capture the nuances of political behavior at the local level. The survey covers various factors associated with political attitudes, and civic engagement which presents a broad perspective on how citizens engage with and within local politics (LISS, 2022).

The survey was presented to 3552 panel members of which 2846 fully completed the survey (response rate = 80.1%). The LISS Local Voters Survey did not include information on demographics such as age, education, and gender. Therefore, the dataset has been merged with the LISS Background Variables March 2022 dataset.¹ This dataset includes the respondents in the Local Voters Survey. It is expected that these merged datasets will provide generalizable and useful results that will advance the overall understanding on the studied relationship.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable of this thesis is electoral participation. The operationalization of political participation as electoral participation aligns with the practicalities of my research design and allows for the examination of concrete and observable outcomes such as voter turnout rates. Even though the Local Voters Survey provides multiple measures of electoral participation such as engaging with municipal parties (displaying a poster for example) and

¹ The LISS Local Voters Survey was conducted in March 2022 and April 2022. Therefore, the March 2022 wave of the Background Variables dataset has been selected.

attending campaign meetings, voting stands out as the final act within the formal electoral system. It represents a person's active contribution to shaping governance and is a clear manifestation of electoral participation. Electoral participation will therefore be measured using a question that asked whether the respondents had participated in the 2022 municipal election by voting (LISS, 2022). The respondents were presented with a 3-point response scale consisting of the answers Yes, No, and Not eligible to vote. A descriptive analysis of the variable reveals that 73,7% of the respondents indicated that they voted in the local election while 25,8% of the respondents did not vote. 0,5% of the respondents were not eligible to vote. The ineligible respondents were removed from the analysis as the goal of this thesis is to find out if political efficacy influences electoral participation. The dependent variable was dummy-coded: if the respondent did not vote the value was recoded to 0 whereas it was recoded to 1 if the respondent did vote.

Independent variables

The main independent variables are local internal political efficacy (LIPE) and local external political efficacy (LEPE). LIPE will be measured through statements that reflect the respondents' understanding of politics (Craig et al., 1990; Morrell, 2003; Mead, 2018).² In the survey, respondents were asked to give their response to the following statements "I have a good picture of the main political issues in our municipality", and "I am well able to fulfill an active role in local politics." The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale for all statements consisting of the following categories: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree. Rescaling was not necessary as both variables pointed in the same and right direction (i.e., higher levels of LIPE are associated with agreeing with the two statements). Initially, 13% of the respondents reported the answer option "I don't know". These cases have been recoded to system missing. The correlation between the two items was

² All statements on political efficacy (internal and external) cover the local aspect and are therefore applicable to this thesis.

statistically significant but moderate ($r = 0.379$, $p < 0.001$). Given their moderate correlation, they will be examined separately in the conclusion. The Tables reporting the additional models are presented in Appendix A. The two items were then averaged together (mean = 2.89, standard deviation = 0.91) as has been done in earlier empirical research on internal political efficacy (Reichert, 2016; Groskurth et al., 2021).

LEPE will be measured through statements that reflect the respondents' belief that the local government will respond to one's beliefs. Again, this approach is widely used in academic research (Morrell, 2003; Mead, 2018; Groskurth et al., 2021). In this case, respondents were asked to give their opinion on the following statements: "Municipal council members do not care for the views of people like me", and "People like me have no influence whatsoever on municipal policies." The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale for all statements consisting of the following categories: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree. Again, cases who reported "I don't know" (10%) were recoded to system missing. Although both variables pointed in the same direction, rescaling was necessary because the statements were negatively phrased. The scale has been reversed so that respondents who said 'Strongly disagree' (original value of 1) were given a score of 5, those who said 'Disagree' (original value of 2) were given a score of 4, and so forth. As a result of this, higher levels of LEPE in the model are now associated with disagreeing with the statements. The two items presented a strong statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.713$, $p < 0.001$) and were averaged together (mean = 3.38, standard deviation = 0.89). Statistics for the main independent variables are presented in Appendix B.

Model and Controls

Given the fact that the dependent variable is binary, a binary logistic regression is the appropriate model to examine the hypotheses. To understand the likelihood of the event occurring, binary logistic regression provides estimates of the odds ratios that are associated

with each independent variable. However, the odds ratios might not provide enough information on the different outcomes in voting when the independent variable increases with one unit, i.e., about the changes in probability. To account for this problem the predicted probabilities were calculated through the compute command in SPSS. The results of this analysis will be discussed accordingly. Additionally, measures that provide information about the model's fit and explanatory power have been included. Almost all assumptions were met. The analysis of outlier cases reported numbers slightly above the threshold. As there were no influential cases, this assumption check did not pose a problem to the model. A brief discussion of these assumptions is presented in Appendix C.

In order to reduce bias in the model and to account for potential confounders, several control variables have been included. Firstly, since the level of trust people place in political institutions has been shown to affect both political participation and political efficacy, political trust has been included as a control variable. The variable is an average of 4 items from the Local Voters Survey (see Appendix D for the created mean index). These items all covered trust in local political institutions and actors and were therefore applicable to this study. Secondly, party membership has also been included as a control variable since members of political parties have shown to display particular political preferences and behaviors (Rusk, 1976). Party membership gives people the feeling that they are part of a group. This party group can then influence one's confidence in their ability to make a difference, i.e., their level of political efficacy. Thirdly, adding income as a control variable takes into consideration potential economic motivations that could influence political behavior and the level of political efficacy (Brady & Schlozman, 2022). Finally, municipality size was added as a control variable, acknowledging that individuals in larger or smaller communities may experience different contextual influences that affect their political outlook and participation (McDonnell, 2023). As stated before, information on standard demographics (age, education, and gender) was

absent in the Local Voters Survey dataset. This problem has been accounted for by merging the dataset with the Background variables dataset. All control variables included in the model were measured on the March 2022 wave of the Local Voters Survey. Appendix D contains information on coding and measurement of all control variables in this study.

Results and Analysis

Table 1. Logistic regression analysis for the probability of voting

| | Model 1 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| (Constant) | -4.793*** (0.511) |
| Internal | 0.484*** (0.074) |
| External | 0.588*** (0.081) |
| Political Trust | 0.535*** (0.126) |
| Party membership | 0.417 (0.430) |
| Income | -0.145* (0.071) |
| Municipality size | 0.001 (0.050) |
| Age | 0.349*** (0.040) |
| Gender | -0.124 (0.134) |
| Education method | 0.157** (0.052) |
| -2LL | 1699.989 |
| Cox and Snell's R² | 0.142 |
| Nagelkerke R² | 0.226 |
| Omnibus test: X² | 310.574*** |

Note: Binary logistic regression coefficients with standard errors between brackets.

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, * p<0,05

Table 2: Relationship of voting in 2022 municipal election and local internal political efficacy

| | | Local Internal Political Efficacy | | | | | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------|-----|------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | |
| Voted | No | 19.3% | 30.1% | 35.7% | 13.1% | 1.8% | 22.5% |
| | Yes | 5.2% | 22.5% | 42.0% | 27.2% | 3.6% | 77.5% |
| <i>Total</i> | | 212 | 614 | 1029 | 610 | 71 | 2536 |

Note: 206 cases missing from the crosstabulation.

Table 3: Relationship of voting in 2022 municipal election and local external political efficacy

| | | Local External Political Efficacy | | | | | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------|-----|------------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | |
| Voted | No | 9.5% | 26.1% | 36.5% | 24.7% | 3.2% | 22.4% |
| | Yes | 1.5% | 10.3% | 30.3% | 49.2% | 8.6% | 77.6% |
| <i>Total</i> | | 83 | 350 | 803 | 1113 | 187 | 2536 |

Note: 206 cases missing from the crosstabulation.

Hypothesis 1 argued that internal political efficacy would positively predict local political participation. Table 1 reports the results from the binary logistic regression used to examine this hypothesis. Holding the effect of the other variables constant: local internal political efficacy, in terms of someone perceiving themselves as being able to play an active role in local politics and having a good picture of the main political issues in the municipality, is positively correlated to voter turnout (the coefficient is positive and $p<0.001$). Local electoral participation is more likely to be observed among those with higher levels of internal political efficacy than those with lower levels. The magnitude of the change in the probability of

electoral participation appears to be great when moving across the range of reported internal political efficacy. Table 4 (below) reports that individuals who stated they strongly disagreed with being able to fulfill an active role in local politics as well as having a good picture of the main political issues in the municipality had a predicted probability of voting of 0.65. On the contrary, those that stated to strongly agree with the above had a predicted probability of voting of 0.93 when all other variables are held at their mean values. The evidence presented is consistent with the first hypothesis of this thesis which stated that local internal political efficacy is positively related to local electoral participation.

Hypothesis 2 argued that local external political efficacy is positively related to local political participation. Table 1 reports the results from the model used to examine this hypothesis. Through recoding the scale, the thesis accounted for the negatively phrased items for external political efficacy. Therefore, finding a positive coefficient would be consistent with the hypothesis. Holding the effects of the other variables constant: local external political efficacy is positively correlated to voter turnout (the coefficient is positive and $p < 0.001$). Local electoral participation is more likely to be observed among those with higher levels of external political efficacy than those with lower levels. Again, the magnitude of the change in the probability of electoral participation appears to be great when moving across the range of reported external political efficacy. Table 4 reports that respondents who said they strongly agreed with municipal council members not caring for the views of people like them as well as not having influence whatsoever on municipal policies had a predicted probability of voting of approximately 0.54. Those who strongly disagreed with the statements had a predicted probability of voting of approximately 0.92 when all other independent variables were held at their mean values. The evidence presented is consistent with the second hypothesis which stated that local external political efficacy is positively related to local electoral participation.

Table 4. Predicted probabilities of voting based on the level of efficacy

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Internal | 0.65 | 0.75 | 0.83 | 0.89 | 0.93 |
| External | 0.54 | 0.67 | 0.79 | 0.87 | 0.92 |

Note: value of 1 indicates the lowest level of internal/external efficacy.

Finally, a statistically significant result for the Omnibus test suggests that the independent variables explain the variability in the dependent variable. Table 1 reports a statistically significant Chi-square value ($X^2 = 310.574$; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, I can conclude that the model containing both internal and external political efficacy is adept at classifying the data. Furthermore, Table 1 reports a Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.226. This finding indicates that the model improves the fit of the data by 22.6%. This leads me to conclude that the model does have predictive power but should be handled with caution (Field, 2017).

As expected, the crosstabulation in Table 2 reports that the percentage of respondents that voted rises with the level of local internal political efficacy. We see that a majority of those who agreed (27.2%) or strongly agreed (3.6%) with the statements on local internal political efficacy, voted in the municipal election, while those who disagreed (30.1%) or strongly disagreed (19.2%) did not vote in the municipal election. The same trend is found in Table 3 which reports the relationship between voting and local external political efficacy. We see that a majority of those who disagreed (49.2%) or strongly disagreed (8.6%) with the (negatively phrased) statements on local external political efficacy, voted in the municipal election, while those who strongly agreed (9.5%) or agreed (26.1%) with the statements did not vote. A large number of the respondents reported that they voted in the 2022 municipal election. Nevertheless, the results are consistent with the hypotheses that local internal and external political efficacy are positively related to political participation. What should be noted is that a significant portion of the respondents have a neutral or moderate stance on local political efficacy. These findings for internal political efficacy hinted at (neutral) response bias, which

implies that the panel might not be interested enough in the survey and therefore answers neutrally (Qualtrix XM, n.d.). Three items from the Local Voters Survey covering aspects of the interest level in the survey and answers were therefore examined. Based on this examination, neutral response bias was not detected. Frequency statistics for these variables are discussed in Appendix C.

Conclusion

This thesis has been grounded in the idea that active political participation is crucial for democratic health and as such it has explored why people participate. Across academic literature, political efficacy stands out as a predictor of political participation. Nevertheless, there has been a limited exploration of this relationship on the local level. To bridge this gap, the thesis examined whether political efficacy promotes political participation at the local level. The theoretical framework established that political participation increases when the costs of political participation are lower than the benefits. Building on this framework, the thesis argued that political efficacy affects this utility calculation to good effect. For internal political efficacy, it was expected that the perceived confidence in understanding politics reduces the complexity, time, and effort for required for political participation. On the other hand, it was expected that the confidence would also lead to a higher perception of your ability to successfully influence political matters and therefore get more benefit out of your deed. For external political efficacy, it was expected that through perceiving the local government to be responsive to your demands you have lower participation relation skepticism, and you would perceive your participation as meaningful. The local level offered new possibilities for positively influencing these utility calculations, ultimately leading to higher levels of political participation. An exhaustive analysis of the results from a binary logistic regression model sustained the argument that both dimensions of political efficacy promote local participation.

Hereafter, the limitations of this study as well as the implications for future research will be discussed.

To start, the focus on the Dutch context highlights a limitation of the conducted study. While key features of the Dutch political system contributed to the effect of the local context on utility calculations, they also pose a challenge to the generalizability of the findings. In *majoritarian* systems, smaller parties often face challenges in securing seats. This stands in stark contrast with the Dutch proportional representation system. Smaller parties are a common occurrence in local politics. If smaller parties struggle to secure representation, citizen's confidence in the responsiveness of local political institutions could be lower, leading to a decrease in voter turnout. Furthermore, the emphasis on local political participation in the decentralized political system of the Netherlands might also shape citizen's political efficacy levels and participation differently than in more centralized systems. In a decentralized system, there is a closer proximity between citizens and local government. This allows citizens to perceive their participation as more immediate and impactful on their surroundings. Furthermore, the decentralized nature of the political system leads to more diversity of local issues resulting in a greater information gap (Dekker & Den Ridder, 2017). This leads citizens to rely strongly on their own confidence to understand and participate in local politics. Nevertheless, many countries do have a proportional representation system (Baron & Diermeier, 2001). The results of this thesis should therefore not be disregarded based on the presented limitation. Rather, the limitation suggests that future research could focus on comparing the effects of distinct democratic systems. This will broaden the understanding of the relationship between political efficacy and political participation.

The phrasing of the statements used to measure both dimensions of political efficacy highlights a second limitation. Surveys typically involve a mix of positive and negative statements to account for potential acquiescence bias (Lindwall et al., 2012; Halperin & Heath,

2020). However, the statements for internal political efficacy were both positive whereas the statements for external political efficacy were both negative. This potentially influenced respondents to perceive political efficacy in either a more positive or more pessimistic way. As a result, the overall validity and reliability of the findings are compromised. Additionally, the exclusive use of positive and negative statements in the measurement of the items limits the ability to make meaningful comparisons between their respective effects. Since such comparisons were not the goal of this thesis nor did this thesis hypothesize that distinct effects would occur, this limitation does not pose an immediate issue. Considering the above, future research should balance negative and positive statements for both political efficacy dimensions. This enables researchers to draw comparisons, and, more importantly, it prevents the potential influence phrasing has on respondents' answers.

To measure local internal efficacy, two items from the Local Voters Survey were averaged into one variable. Given the moderate correlation between the items, two additional logistic regression analyses were run to separate the effects. The results showed that holding the effects of the other variables constant, both items of internal political efficacy are positively correlated to voter turnout (the coefficients are positive and $p < 0.001$; $p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the change in the probability of electoral participation was great when moving across the range of reported confidence in having a good picture of the main political issues. In contrast, the magnitude of the change in the probability of electoral participation was moderate when moving across the range of reported confidence in being able to fulfill an active role in local politics. This suggests that, in terms of promoting local political participation, being confident in the ability to fulfill an active role is less important than being confident in understanding local political issues. Future research should examine the reason for these distinct effects to determine whether the confidence in fulfilling an active role covers the concept of internal political efficacy in its entirety.

In conclusion, the thesis contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the unique way in which political efficacy promotes political participation on the local level. Local political institutions should investigate whether or how they can enhance levels of political efficacy to overturn drops in municipal election voter turnout. After all, a strong democracy depends on vibrant political participation.

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Appendix A – Binary logistic regression of measures of LIPE

Table A.1 Logistic regression analyses for the probability of voting (goodpicture and activerole)

| | Good picture | Activerole |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| (Constant) | -4.943*** (0.530) | -4.010*** (0.498) |
| Internal Political Efficacy Measure | 0.548*** (0.068) | 0.153* (0.062) |
| External Political Efficacy | 0.626*** (0.084) | 0.636*** (0.083) |
| Political Trust | 0.510*** (0.131) | 0.567*** (0.127) |
| Party membership | 0.413 (0.432) | 0.579 (0.429) |
| Income | -0.134 (0.073) | -0.125 (0.070) |
| Municipality size | 0.025 (0.052) | 0.005 (0.051) |
| Age | 0.306*** (0.042) | 0.345*** (0.041) |
| Gender | -0.161 (0.138) | -0.206 (0.135) |
| Education method | 0.148** (0.054) | 0.157** (0.053) |
| -2LL | 1586.824 | 1656.285 |
| Cox and Snell's R² | 0.148 | 0.126 |
| Nagelkerke R² | 0.238 | 0.200 |
| Omnibus test: X² | 311.668*** | 259.830*** |
| N | 1945 | 1933 |

Note: Binary logistic regression coefficients with standard errors between brackets.

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, * p<0,05

Table A.2 Predicted probabilities of voting based on the level of efficacy

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Good picture | 0.60 | 0.72 | 0.82 | 0.89 | 0.93 |
| Active role | 0.78 | 0.80 | 0.83 | 0.85 | 0.87 |

Note: value of 1 indicates the lowest level of internal/external efficacy.

Appendix B – measures of LIPE and LEPE

Correlations old and recoded variables LIPE: $r = 1$ which indicates that only system missing values were changed in recoding.

Correlations

| | | I am well able to fulfil an active role in local politics. | activerole |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| I am well able to fulfil an active role in local politics. | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 1,000** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <,001 |
| | N | 2397 | 2397 |
| activerole | Pearson Correlation | 1,000** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <,001 | |
| | N | 2397 | 2397 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

| | | I have a good picture of the main political issues in our municipality. | goodpicture |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| I have a good picture of the main political issues in our municipality. | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 1,000** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <,001 |
| | N | 2389 | 2389 |
| goodpicture | Pearson Correlation | 1,000** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <,001 | |
| | N | 2389 | 2389 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations activerole and goodpicture: $r = 0.379$ which indicates a moderate correlation between the two items of internal political efficacy.

Correlations

| | | activerole | goodpicture |
|-------------|---------------------|------------|-------------|
| activerole | Pearson Correlation | 1 | ,379** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <,001 |
| | N | 2397 | 2250 |
| goodpicture | Pearson Correlation | ,379** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <,001 | |
| | N | 2250 | 2389 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations old and recoded variables LEPE: $r = -1$ which indicates that the variables have been reverse coded correctly.

Correlations

| | | nocare | Municipal council members do not care for the views of people like me. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| nocare | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -1,000** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <,001 |
| | N | 2457 | 2457 |
| Municipal council members do not care for the views of people like me. | Pearson Correlation | -1,000** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <,001 | |
| | N | 2457 | 2457 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

| | | noinfluence | People like me have no influence whatsoever on municipal politics. |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| noinfluence | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -1,000** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <,001 |
| | N | 2501 | 2501 |
| People like me have no influence whatsoever on municipal politics. | Pearson Correlation | -1,000** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <,001 | |
| | N | 2501 | 2501 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations nocare and noinfluence: $r = 0.713$ which indicates a strong correlation between the two items for external political efficacy.

Correlations

| | | noinfluence | nocare |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|
| noinfluence | Pearson Correlation | 1 | ,713** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <,001 |
| | N | 2501 | 2422 |
| nocare | Pearson Correlation | ,713** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <,001 | |
| | N | 2422 | 2457 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Descriptive statistics new variables LIPE and LEPE

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|------|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| External | 2536 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 3,3837 | ,88838 |
| Internal | 2536 | 1,00 | 5,00 | 2,8882 | ,90627 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 2489 | | | | |

Appendix C – assumption checks

No Multicollinearity: no multicollinearity is detected as VIF values are all below 5.

C.1: VIF values model 1

| Main regression model | VIF |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Internal Political Efficacy | 1.216 |
| External Political Efficacy | 1.437 |
| Political Trust | 1.324 |
| Party membership | 1.052 |
| Income | 1.366 |
| Municipality size | 1.032 |
| Age | 1.102 |
| Gender | 1.189 |
| Education method | 1.373 |

C.2: VIF values logistic regression for LIPE measure ‘good picture’

| Good picture | VIF |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Internal Political Efficacy | 1.090 |
| External Political Efficacy | 1.396 |
| Political Trust | 1.326 |
| Party membership | 1.042 |
| Income | 1.372 |
| Municipality size | 1.034 |
| Age | 1.101 |
| Gender | 1.173 |
| Education method | 1.363 |

C.3: VIF values logistic regression for LIPE measure ‘active role’

| Active role | VIF |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Internal Political Efficacy | 1.277 |
| External Political Efficacy | 1.466 |
| Political Trust | 1.325 |
| Party membership | 1.050 |
| Income | 1.361 |
| Municipality size | 1.034 |
| Age | 1.130 |
| Gender | 1.184 |
| Education method | 1.378 |

No complete separation: the assumption is met.

C.4 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and local internal political efficacy

| | | Local Internal Political Efficacy | | | | | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------|-----|-----------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | |
| Voted | No | 110 | 172 | 204 | 75 | 10 | 571 |
| | Yes | 102 | 442 | 825 | 535 | 61 | 1965 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 212 | 614 | 1029 | 610 | 71 | 2536 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.5 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and local external political efficacy

| | | Local External Political Efficacy | | | | | |
|--------------|-----|------------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------|
| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 54 | 148 | 207 | 140 | 18 | 567 |
| | Yes | 29 | 202 | 596 | 973 | 169 | 1969 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 83 | 350 | 803 | 1113 | 187 | 2536 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.6 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and political trust

| | | Political Trust | | | | |
|--------------|-----|------------------------|----------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| | | Not at all | Not much | Quite much | Very much | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 46 | 261 | 238 | 18 | 563 |
| | Yes | 51 | 565 | 1165 | 147 | 1928 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 97 | 826 | 1403 | 165 | 2491 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.7 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and age

| | | Age | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| | | 15-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65 years+ | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 120 | 101 | 110 | 149 | 113 | 117 | 710 |
| | Yes | 165 | 243 | 241 | 325 | 387 | 669 | 2030 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 285 | 344 | 351 | 474 | 500 | 786 | 2740 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.8 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and education method

| | | Education method | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----|-------------------------|------|----------|-----|-----|-----|--------------|
| | | Primary school | VMBO | Havo/vwo | Mbo | Hbo | Wo | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 29 | 145 | 73 | 211 | 139 | 67 | 664 |
| | Yes | 49 | 324 | 231 | 441 | 602 | 349 | 1996 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 78 | 469 | 304 | 652 | 741 | 416 | 2660 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.9 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and gender

| | | Gender | | | |
|--------------|-----|---------------|--------|-------|--------------|
| | | Male | Female | Other | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 301 | 409 | 0 | 664 |
| | Yes | 987 | 1041 | 2 | 1996 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 1288 | 1450 | 2 | 2740 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.10 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and party membership

| | | Party membership | | |
|--------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|--------------|
| | | No | Yes | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 695 | 7 | 702 |
| | Yes | 1935 | 92 | 2027 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 2630 | 99 | 2729 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.11 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and personal net monthly income

| | | Personal net monthly income in euros | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----|---------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| | | 0-1000 | 1001-2000 | 2001-3000 | 3001-4000 | 4001-5000 | 5001 or higher | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 113 | 236 | 166 | 43 | 8 | 8 | 574 |
| | Yes | 279 | 646 | 575 | 202 | 61 | 15 | 1778 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 392 | 882 | 741 | 245 | 69 | 23 | 2352 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

C.12 Crosstabulation voted in 2022 municipal election and municipality size

| | | Municipality size | | | | |
|--------------|-----|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| | | 0-50000 | 50001-100000 | 100001-150000 | 150001 or higher | <i>Total</i> |
| Voted | No | 283 | 151 | 72 | 205 | 771 |
| | Yes | 850 | 433 | 208 | 540 | 2031 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 1133 | 584 | 280 | 745 | 2742 |

Source: LISS Local Voters Survey 2022

No influential cases

C.13 Cook's distance resulting from logistic regression

| | | Cook's distance > 1 |
|-----------|--|-------------------------------|
| Frequency | | 0 |
| Percent | | 0% |
| Missing | | 709 |
| <i>N</i> | | 2742 |

Cook's distance resulting from logistic regression. There were 0 cases with a reported Cook's distance of above 1. Therefore the assumption is met.

No outliers

C.14 Normalized residuals (ZRE) resulting from logistic regression

| | Larger than 1.96 | Larger than 2.58 | Larger than 3.29 |
|-----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Frequency | 137 | 64 | 22 |
| Percent | 5.0% | 2.3% | 0.8% |
| Missing | 709 | 709 | 709 |
| <i>N</i> | 2742 | 2742 | 2742 |

The number of cases that reported larger normalized residuals (ZRE) than 2.58 and 3.29 is a bit above the threshold. However, as there are no influential cases (see C.13 above) I assume that the outliers do not affect my model.

Ruling out neutral response bias

Statistics

| | | Did you find the topic interesting? | Did the questionnaire get you thinking? | Did you enjoy answering the questions? |
|------|---------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| N | Valid | 2722 | 2722 | 2722 |
| | Missing | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Mean | | 3,52 | 3,32 | 3,62 |

The responses were measured on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 indicated ‘Certainly not’ and 5 indicated ‘Certainly yes.’ All items reported a mean between 3.32 and 3.62. This leads to the conclusion that most respondents were in fact interested (enough). Therefore, no neutral response bias was detected.

Appendix D – coding and measurement of control variables

| Variable | Coding | Description |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Political Trust | 1 = ‘Not at all’ 2 = ‘Not much’ 3 = ‘Quite much’ 4 = ‘Very much’ | This variables is a combined variable of 4 items on the Local Voters Survey. All variables have been tested for reliability. For the average variable the following descriptive statistics were reported: mean = 2.66, standard deviation = 0.55, Cronbach’s alpha = 0.870. |
| Party membership | 0 = ‘No’ 1 = ‘Yes’ | Respondents were asked whether they were member of a political party. |
| Personal net monthly income | 1 = ‘0-1000’ 2 = ‘1001-2000’ 3 = ‘2001-3000’ 4 = ‘3001-4000’ 5 = ‘4001-5000’ 6 = ‘5001 and more’ | The variable was recoded because its original categories did not represent the same amount of income. |
| Municipality size | 1 = ‘0-50000’ 2 = ‘50001-100000’ | The variable reports the number of citizens in the |

| | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 3 = '100001-150000' 4 = 150000 and more | respondent's municipality. The variable was recoded because its original categories did not represent the same amount of income |
| Age | 1 = '15-24' 2 = '25-34' 3 = '35-44' 4 = '55-64' 6 = '64 and older' | This variable contains information on the size population of a respondent's current municipality. It has been recoded after the removal of the original first category of '14 years and younger.' |
| Gender | 1 = 'Male' 2 = 'Female' 3 = 'Other' | Descriptive statistics showed only two respondents were reported as 'Other'. |
| Education method | 1 = Primary school 2 = VMBO 3 = 'Havo/vwo' 4 = 'Mbo' 5 = 'Hbo' 6 = 'Wo' | This variable indicates the level of education of respondents. The variable has been recoded to account so that 'Other' and 'Not (yet) completed any education' were reported as system missing. |

Reliability test Political Trust

Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------|
| ,867 | ,870 | 4 |

Descriptive statistics political trust

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|------|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| PoliticalTrust | 2585 | 1,00 | 4,00 | 2,6596 | ,55348 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 2585 | | | | |