

Measuring Peace, Justice and Inclusion

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SDG 16.7.2: Ensuring Inclusive and Responsive Decision-Making for Sustainable Development

The recent increase in popular protests around the world – whether related to government measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of corruption and lack of accountability, or the historical exclusion of and injustice against certain groups – has highlighted that ever-greater numbers of people feel forgotten by their political system and unable to shape the decisions affecting their lives. People’s self-perception of their ability to have a say in what the government does and to influence change through their own actions – their “political efficacy” – has been found to be a key driver of participation in public life and of trust in government. This brief focuses on SDG indicator 16.7.2, which measures people’s belief that the government will listen to, and act on, their opinions. It discusses the indicator’s rationale and its methodology and presents examples of how national statistical offices (NSOs) around the world are already producing statistics on the perceived inclusiveness and responsiveness of public decision-making in their respective countries.

Inclusive and responsive decision-making

Decreasing levels of political participation are being seen across many contexts, which is in part illustrated by lower levels of election turnout globally and low levels of participation and engagement in decision-making processes beyond voting.ⁱ Expanding the space for civic engagement and developing ways to provide people with a more direct role in setting agendas and shaping the public decisions that affect them can be an important factor for more inclusive and responsive governance. As

people perceive that they have a role in influencing the actions of government and that the decisions being made are more responsive to their priorities, their confidence and trust in government may build, leading to a more politically engaged population that participates more actively in political and public affairs.

The current reality, however, is that in many countries, a large share of the population considers

that the government does not incorporate the views of many population groups when designing policies. The recent increase in protests worldwide can be understood as a manifestation of the disillusionment many people feel in the responsiveness of their governance systems.ⁱⁱ While global official data on this issue is not yet available, data from the World Values Survey (2020) show that across 45 countries, on average, only 61.5% of respondents believe that the political system in their country allows people like them to have at least some say in what the government does.ⁱⁱⁱ At the regional level, the European Social Survey (2018) found that 38% of respondents consider that the political system allows them to have some say, while 49% in the Afrobarometer (2021) think that their local government councillors try their best to listen to what people like them have to say at least sometimes.^{iv} It is in this context that SDG indicator 16.7.2 was adopted as part of the monitoring framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Member States have been encouraged to report on it.^v

Globally, there are many ongoing efforts involving civic activism, civil society engagement and government action to enhance the inclusiveness and responsiveness of public decision-making, building on the concept of “**participatory governance**” (or participatory democracy).^{vi} A central tenet of participatory governance is that everyone affected by a particular decision should be able to take part in the decision-making process, without discrimination. A wide range of participatory methods have been used around the world – online and offline – including town hall meetings, focus groups, public consultations, opinion polls and participatory budgets.^{vii}

Participatory governance principles are also enshrined in human rights frameworks, including as

part of the **right to take part in the conduct of public affairs**, which was adopted in the 1960s as a universal human right grounded in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, Art. 25). General Comment no. 25 on article 25 of the ICCPR explains that the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs can be realised in several ways, beyond voting, serving as an elected representative or holding executive office – notably by “*decid[ing] public issues through a referendum or other electoral processes,*” by “*tak[ing] part in popular assemblies which have the power to make decisions about local issues ... and in bodies established to represent citizens in consultation with government,*” by “*tak[ing] part in public debate, in dialogue with their elected representatives,*” and by “*form[ing] and join[ing] organizations and associations concerned with political and public affairs.*”^{viii} Since then, an extensive international normative framework has been adopted which recognizes that people’s ability to have a say in the shaping of policies and to dissent without fear are fundamental rights (*See Box 1*).

Since the 1980s, and increasingly from the 2010s, the concept of “**deliberative governance**” (or deliberative democracy) has been gaining traction.^{ix} Deliberative governance goes beyond consulting people on their needs or opinions; it focuses on people as **active participants** in the deliberations that precede decision-making and empowers them to make recommendations to decision makers. While participatory governance tends to focus more on the number of people participating – ideally the entire population – in political processes, deliberative governance focuses on involving relatively small (but representative) groups of people to enable deep deliberations. The objective of such a process is to reach public consensus on the way forward on different policy issues (*see Box 7 for examples*).

Box 1. Key international standards on the right to participate in public affairs

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art. 25) – “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives.”

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Art. 7) – “State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: ... (b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof”

Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) (Art. 1) – “Urges Member States to consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict ... and for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute resolution.”

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Art. 29) – “State parties shall ... promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs.”

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Art. 5) – “State parties undertake to ... guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, color, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of ... (c) Political rights, in particular the right ... to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service.”

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (Art. 2 and 4) and **Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** (Art. 5 and 13) provide that persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples have the right to participate fully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State, and that States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Art. 15) – “The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.”

Why is it important to ensure that decision-making is inclusive and responsive?

The use of inclusive and responsive decision-making approaches can generate a range of tangible payoffs (see Box 2).

- Empirical evidence shows that **it can lead to better policy outcomes**. When a diverse group of people participate in public decision-making, the resulting recommendations are more likely to take into consideration significant deprivations faced by some groups that may otherwise have been overlooked. They are also more likely to prioritize the public good rather than the short-term incentives of electoral cycles.^x
- Giving people an effective role in public decision-making can **enhance public trust in government and public institutions**.^{xi} People are more likely to trust institutions that empower them to be more directly involved in decision-making instead of treating them merely as objects of legislation and administration.^{xii}
- Higher levels of system responsiveness are associated with **higher levels of political participation**, including voting in elections.^{xiii} People who feel that they can impact decision-making are more likely to participate in political processes.^{xiv}
- Inclusive and responsive decision-making **can reduce the potential for conflicts and enhance the prospect of building consensus**. By opening the door to a much more diverse group of people, policymakers can better identify where consensus is feasible, and they have greater legitimacy to make hard choices.^{xv} In other words, people are more likely to endorse and comply with a decision that has been influenced by broader groups of people than one made solely by government or behind closed doors.
- It can also **enhance political stability**, as individuals who are confident about their ability to influence the actions of their government are more likely to support their political system.^{xvi}
- Inclusive decision-making can **strengthen oversight to promote integrity and prevent corruption** by ensuring that the disproportionate influence on public decisions of groups and individuals with money and power may be held in check.^{xvii}
- Some studies also indicate that people's involvement in political decisions can also directly **contribute to their sense of well-being^{xviii} and purpose in life.**^{xix}

Box 2. Empirical studies on the impact of applying inclusive methods in public decision-making

The examples below highlight findings from a range of studies at local and national levels as well as cross-country studies exploring the impact of using a range of participatory methods for decision making.

Increases political participation

An analysis of 30 European countries showed that people's perception that their participation will influence what the government does, has a positive impact on traditional forms of participation, within the political system. Conversely, low levels of political efficacy have been found to be associated with a higher use of digital forms and "outside of the system" participation. In this sense, this study's results indicate that political institutions with little responsiveness to citizens' demands may reorient people towards "exit activities" (outside the system) instead of "voice activities" (within the system).

Leads to better solutions when dealing with complex issues

Diverse group deliberations are likely to lead to better solutions when dealing with extremely complex matters, such as energy or water use, nuclear waste storage, infrastructure or government budgets.

Evidence shows that diversity is an essential aspect of a group's ability to deal with complexity, because collective intelligence can out-strip one person's reasoning, or even the thinking done by a group of like-minded people.

Increases trust and confidence in institutions

At the conclusion of the Melbourne's People Panel (a "citizens' jury" of 43 residents established to make recommendations on an AUS \$5 billion financial plan for the Melbourne City Council, in Australia), jury members were found to have significantly increased levels of trust and confidence in the council and a higher general satisfaction with where the city was heading.

Increases perceptions of fairness around public decision-making and the legitimacy of public institutions

Participants involved in deliberative decision-making processes often conclude that the systematic use of deliberative methods by public authorities can lead to fairer outcomes. Additionally, people are more likely to accept an outcome that they did not agree to if they have confidence that it was reached through a fair process.

Fosters social cohesion in post-conflict societies

Deliberative decision-making processes have been applied in divided societies such as South Africa, Turkey, Bosnia, Belgium and Northern Ireland, and in some circumstances, such processes can help to enable dialogue and bridge deep conflicts across religious, national, racial and ethnic lines.

Enhances people's satisfaction with life

The Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey (2018/19) in South Africa showed that people who thought that none of five key national institutions listened and acted on issues being raised by the community were more frequently people who were *dissatisfied* with life – that is, only 8.9% of those who were *satisfied* with life thought that none of five key national institutions listened and acted on the issues that the community raised, while 13.7% of those who were *dissatisfied* with life thought the same.

Sources: Prats, M. and Meunier, A. (2021). "Political efficacy and participation: An empirical analysis in European countries." *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 46, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4548cad8-en>. Landemore, H. (2012). "Why the Many are Smarter than the Few and Why It Matters." *Journal of Public Deliberation*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, Article 7; Reece, N. (2015). *Melbourne People's Panel makes bold decisions where politicians fear to tread*, *The Age*. Roberts, J. and Escobar, O. (2015). "Involving communities in deliberation: A study of three citizens' juries on onshore wind farms in Scotland." Edinburgh: ClimateXChange and The University of Edinburgh. O'Flynn, I. (2007). "Divided Societies and Deliberative Democracy." *British Journal of Political Science* 37 (4): 731–751. Luskin, R. C., O'Flynn, I., Fishkin, J. S. and Russell, D. (2014). "Deliberating across Deep Divides." *Political Studies* 62 (1): 117. Delli Carpini, M. X. D., Cook, F. L. and Jacobs, L. R. (2004). "Public deliberation, discursive participation, and citizen engagement: A review of the empirical literature." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7, 315-344. Statistics South Africa (2019). *Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey, 2018/19 – Statistical Release P0340: Governance and Access to Justice*, p.17.

Measuring inclusive and responsive decision-making

SDG target 16.7 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underlines that “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” is necessary to achieve more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. SDG indicator 16.7.2 – *the proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group* – is one of two indicators used to monitor this target. The first indicator (SDG 16.7.1a, b, c) draws on administrative data sources to measure objectively the representation of various population groups in public institutions – namely a) the parliament, b) the public service and c) the judiciary – compared to their share in the national population. But **formal**

inclusion alone is not a guarantee that representatives of minority or marginalized groups are actually able to take part in and influence decision-making processes. This first indicator also does not capture whether **people** can directly participate in decision-making processes (rather than their representatives). SDG indicator 16.7.2 therefore provides important complementary information to monitor SDG target 16.7 by measuring the inclusiveness and responsiveness of public decision-making **as perceived by the general population**, through the use of population surveys. SDG 16.7.2 data can also complement several other SDG indicators under Goal 16 and beyond, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Interlinkages between SDG 16.7.2 data and other SDG indicators

Other related SDG indicators	SDG 16.7.2 data		
	Women	Youth	Persons with Disabilities
4.4.1 Youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills		X	
5.1.1 Legal frameworks (equality and non-discrimination)	X		
5.5.1 Seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments	X		
10.3.1 and 16.b.1 Population having felt discriminated / harassed	X	X	X
11.3.2 Direct participation structure for civil society in urban planning and management	X	X	X
16.7.1 a, b, c Representation in the legislatures, the public service and the judiciary	X	X	X
16.10.1 Cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates	X	X	X
16.10.2 Public access to information	X	X	X

SDG indicator 16.7.2 addresses people’s attitudes towards their ability to influence and engage in political life – or their “**political efficacy**.”^{xx} Survey questions on political efficacy^{xxi} are well-established as part of national election surveys. They aim to monitor people’s belief in the responsiveness of the political system, that is, **the extent to which**

people think that public institutions and government officials will listen to, and act on, their demands and opinions.^{xxii} Ultimately, a better understanding of these perceptions can help governments develop strategies to improve political efficacy and promote participation by, for example,

developing new institutional mechanisms or channels to increase participation.

Two survey questions are used to measure SDG 16.7.2 (see Box 3). The first measures the extent to which people feel that the political system in their country allows people like them to “**have a say**” in **what the government does** – in other words, the extent to which decision-making is *inclusive*. The second one measures the extent to which people feel that the political system in their country allows people like them to “**have an influence**” on **politics**. The focus here is on the extent to which decision-making is *responsive*.

It is important to acknowledge that variations in levels of political efficacy (both over time and across distinct population groups) may be due not only to variations in the conduct of political actors and public

institutions, but also to variations in respondents’ mindsets.^{xxiii} For instance, a decline over time of levels of political efficacy may result from the rise of a more demanding or perhaps more critically minded and inquiring population, rather than from major changes in the functioning of these institutions. It is therefore important to deploy appropriate analytical strategies to differentiate between objective and subjective effects on changes in political efficacy levels when analysing national trends on SDG 16.7.2.

People’s perceived capacity to shape government decisions is also affected by their socio-demographic and economic background: it has been shown in OECD countries, for example, that levels of political efficacy increase with both income and education (as higher levels of education increase the probability of individuals participating in political life), while the levels decrease with age.^{xxiv}

Box 3. Methodology used to measure SDG 16.7.2

Two survey questions:

1. **To measure the extent to which decision-making is inclusive:** How much would you say the political system in [country X] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?
Not at all / Very little / Some / A lot / A great deal
2. **To measure the extent to which decision-making is responsive:** And how much would you say that the political system in [country X] allows people like you to have an influence on politics?
Not at all / Very little / Some / A lot / A great deal

Computation method:

1. Cumulative percentage of respondents who responded positively to each question (*Some / A lot / A great deal*)
2. Percentage of those who responded positively to both questions

Source: [SDG Indicators Metadata Repository](#)

Measuring the extent to which particular groups are excluded from political and public affairs

Substantial evidence points to the exclusion of certain groups from political decision-making as a

key factor contributing to **civil conflict and instability**, which in turn affects political transition

or democratic consolidation. SDG indicator 16.7.2 can be useful in providing insights into the extent to which particular groups feel they are not being heard by decision-makers, relative to majority groups. As such, SDG 16.7.2 recommends that survey results be disaggregated by sex, age, disability status and population group (mandatory disaggregation dimensions), and if possible, by income level, education level and place of residence (administrative region, e.g. province, state, district; urban/rural).

For instance, barriers to meaningful and inclusive youth participation in governance can be key factors increasing conflict risk. The disenfranchisement of young people, along with other marginalized groups, from formal political systems might leave them not only frustrated but also mistrustful of political systems and government institutions. In such contexts, there is a risk that if avenues for political participation remain limited, people will seek out alternative and informal channels of political participation. This can include, for example, civil society engagement, grassroots activism, protest movements or, in some extreme cases, more violent means, to ensure their voices are heard.^{xxv}

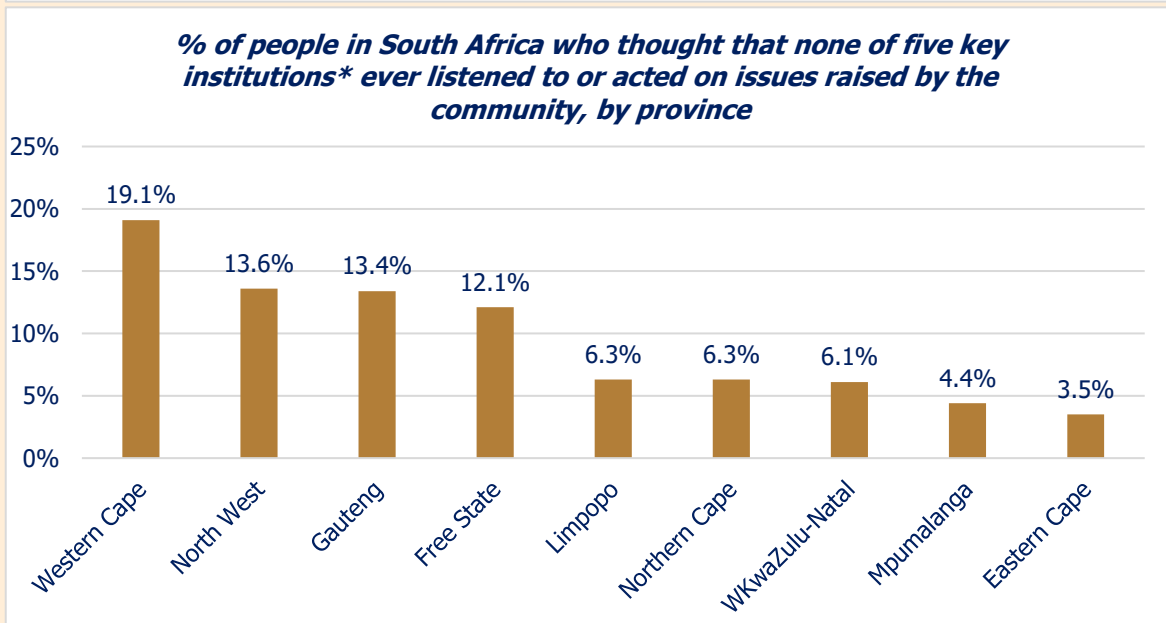
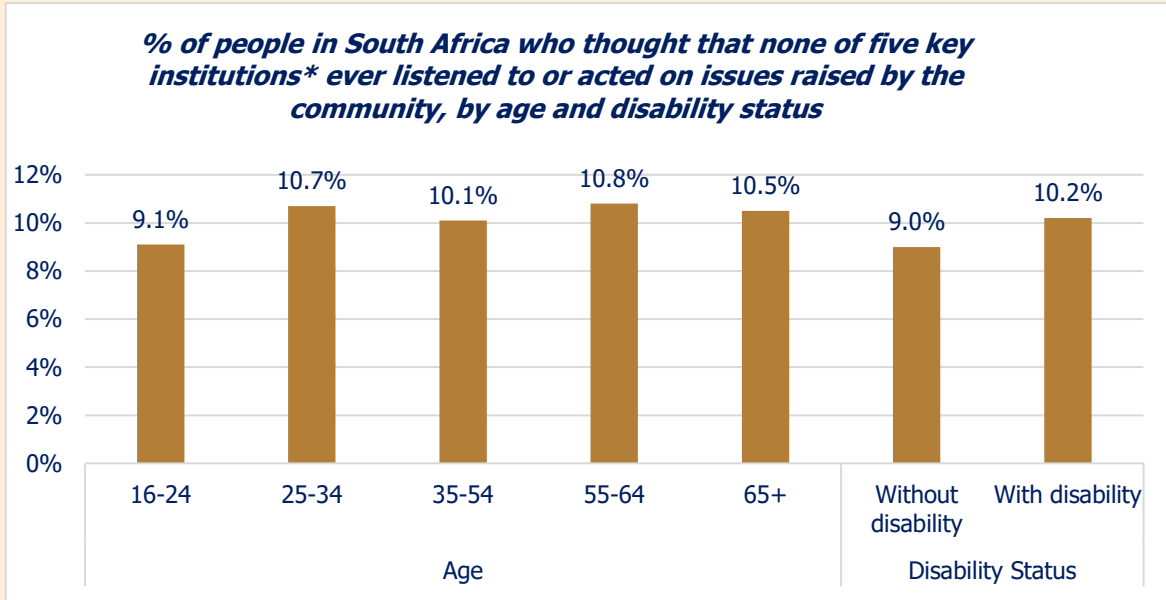
It is important also to note that *perceptions* of inequalities between groups often matter more in terms of collective mobilization than objective measures of inequality and exclusion. This makes the regular monitoring of *perceived* political horizontal inequalities between groups or geographic areas (as measured by SDG indicator 16.7.2) all the more important to be able to engage in preventive action early.^{xxvi} Recognizing and mitigating the risks that legitimate social, political or economic grievances of specific groups could be exploited to incite violence is increasingly important, especially in the context of deep divisions and polarization of groups, along with the rapid spread of hate speech and misinformation.

In **South Africa**, the Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey (2018/19) measured the perceived responsiveness of community and political leaders, with survey results showing that an estimated 10% of the South African population thought that none of the five key national institutions (leaders of community organizations/traditional leaders, police officials, local elected officials/councillors, members of national parliament and the Public Protector) ever listened to or acted on issues that the community raised. The percentage across age groups and according to disability status showed almost no differences, with only slightly lower percentage of individuals feeling unheard when belonging to age group 16 to 24, or those without disability (*see Box 4*). On the other hand, there were evident regional differences. It was found that people living in the (comparatively well-off) Western Cape region were significantly more likely than other population groups to think that none of the five key national institutions ever listened to or acted on issues raised by the community.

In 2019, **Colombia's** National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) integrated the first question used to report on SDG 16.7.2 (on "having a say in what the government does") into its [Political Culture Survey](#), followed by the integration of the second question (on "having an influence on politics") in 2021. A review of the 2021 survey results showed that in Colombia, 26.7% of the population feel like they "have a say in what the government does," and 20.6% feel like they "have an influence in politics." On average, higher levels of political efficacy (both in "having a say" and in "having an influence") were recorded among the population in rural areas than in urban areas, although the difference on "having a say" was much more minimal between the two areas in the 2019 survey. As illustrated in *Box 5*, age also plays a significant role in people's sense of perceived efficacy, with people under 40 less likely than older generations to feel they have a say and influence over politics.

Box 4: South Africa’s experience on disaggregating data on inclusive and responsive decision-making

The graphs below are derived from the Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa in 2018/19. They illustrate the different responses on inclusive decision-making when disaggregated by socio-demographic and geographic lines.

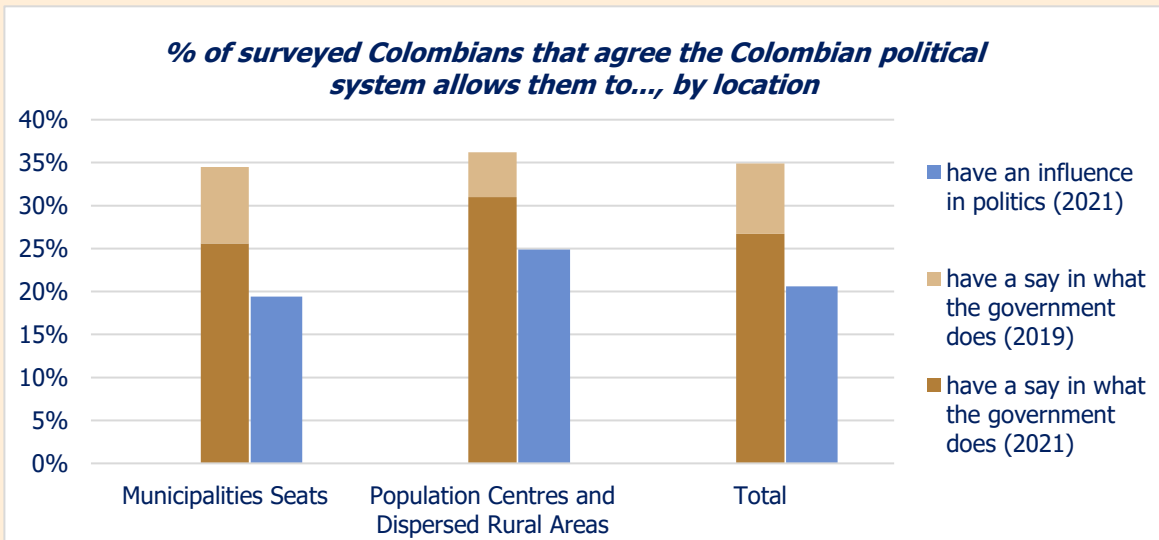
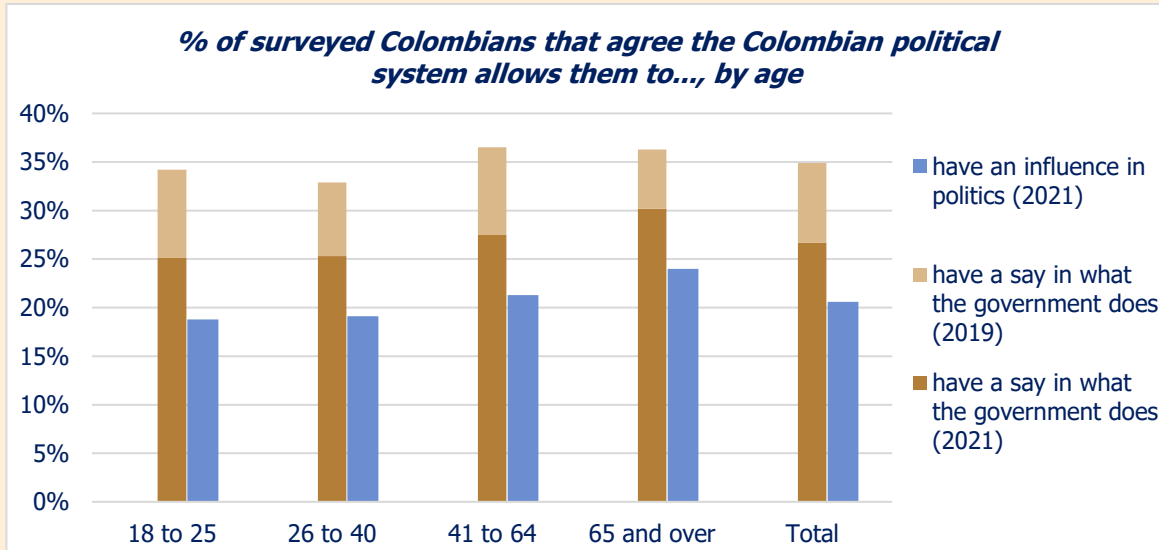


*The five institutions cited in the survey include: 1) leaders of community organizations/traditional leaders, 2) police officials, 3) local elected officials/councillors, 4) members of national parliament, 5) Public Protector

Source: Statistics South Africa (2019), Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey, 2018/19 – Statistical Release P0340: Governance & Access to Justice, p.17

Box 5: Colombia’s experience on disaggregating data on inclusive and responsive decision-making

The graphs below are derived from the Political Cultural Survey conducted by Colombia’s National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) in 2019 and 2021. They illustrate the different responses on inclusive decision-making when disaggregated by socio-demographic and geographic lines.



Note: The municipal seat is a term used in the context of the DANE census in Colombia. It corresponds to the most densely populated area of the municipality and the place where the headquarters of the Municipal Mayor’s Office operates. Its geographical area is defined by an urban perimeter, whose limits are established by "agreements" of the Municipal Council. Population Centres have less than 1,000 inhabitants and are located in rural areas.

Sources: DANE, Political culture survey (ECP), December 2019, National Data Archive (ANDA): http://microdatos.dane.gov.co/index.php/catalog/644/get_microdata; DANE, Political Culture Survey, March 2022, <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/cultura/cultura-politica-encuesta> and DANE, April 2022, [Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda \(CNPV 2018\)](#).

Data availability on inclusive and responsive decision-making

Currently, there is no globally comparable official dataset on political efficacy. Several national statistical offices (NSOs), however, are already taking the lead by measuring the extent to which people feel they can input into and impact decision-making, as there is growing demand from policymakers for such information.

In South Africa, Statistics South Africa's Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey (2018/19) included survey questions on government responsiveness based on a recognition that "peoples' perception of these institutions is an important determinant of whether or not such institutions will succeed [in promoting and enforcing the Constitution]. Negative perceptions may discourage people from using these institutions."^{xxvii} Overall, survey results on this question showed that the South African police (27%) was found to be the institution that most "*often or always* listened to and acted on issues raised by the community," followed by leaders of community organizations/traditional leaders (22%). At the other end of the spectrum, members of parliament were found to be the least responsive (40.6% of respondents said MPs *never* listened to or acted on issues raised by the community), followed by local elected officials (35.4%) and the Public Protector (33.9%).

There is, however, a large variability in question wordings and response formats used across countries (*see Box 6*). This variability poses a significant challenge for the global comparability of such data. In order to address this challenge and to provide guidance on the collection of data on this

indicator, the [SDG 16 Survey questionnaire](#) includes the two questions to be used to report on SDG 16.7.2. The SDG 16 Survey was developed by UNDP, UNODC and OHCHR, and welcomed by the UN Statistical Commission in 2021, as a tool to facilitate the production of globally comparable data on 13 survey-based indicators under SDG 16, including on SDG 16.7.2.^{xxviii} This is a ground-breaking, well-tested and readily available tool for NSOs interested in starting to produce statistics on this topic.

Meanwhile, several **non-official household surveys**, such as the Gallup World Poll, the World Values Survey, the European Social Survey, the Afrobarometer and other regional barometer surveys, also use similar questions to measure political efficacy. While these surveys are often conducted on relatively small samples, which constrains the disaggregation of results, they offer the advantage of relying on consistent questions across countries, and over time. The two specific survey questions used to report on SDG 16.7.2 have already been integrated in many global and regional surveys. The [World Values Survey Association \(WVSA\)](#) has integrated the first question ("having a say in what the government does") during its 7th wave (2017-21) in more than **40 countries in all regions of the world**. Similarly, a slightly adjusted version of this first question is included in the [Adult Skills Survey \(PIAAC\)](#) administered across **39 OECD countries and partner countries**. And since 2016, the [European Social Survey](#) has been administering the two questions every two years across **29 European countries** (latest data available from 2018).

Box 6. Illustrative survey questions from national household surveys to measure the extent to which decision-making is inclusive and responsive

1. To measure the extent to which decision-making is inclusive:

National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), Colombia – Political Culture Survey (2021):

- Do you agree that the Colombian political system allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?

National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and National Electoral Institute (INE), Mexico – National Survey of Civic Culture (ENCUCI 2020):

- Tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In Mexico, for decision-making, the government considers the opinions of people like you."

Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi), Norway – Citizen survey (biennial):

- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the Storting politicians (i.e. elected MPs) / local politicians listen to citizens' viewpoints and opinions?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following assertions about the Norwegian public sector (at central government, municipal or county level): The public sector consults with its users when services and service options are being developed.

Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), State of Palestine – Governance Survey (2008):

- Is it easy for you, if you try, to approach the elected officials who represent your electoral district?

2. To measure the extent to which decision-making is responsive:

National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), Colombia – Political Culture Survey (2021):

- Do you agree that the Colombian political system allows people like you to have influence in politics?

National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and National Electoral Institute (INE), Mexico – National Survey of Civic Culture (ENCUCI 2020):

- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: "People in government don't care much about what people like you think."

Statistics South Africa (SSA), South Africa – Governance Public Safety and Justice Survey (GPSJS 2018/19):

- I am going to read a number of government/public officials. For each one, could you tell me how often do you think they listen and act on issues that the community raise:
 - leaders of community organizations/traditional leaders
 - police officials
 - local elected officials/councillors
 - members of national parliament
 - Public Protector

African Union – ShaSA Survey on Governance, Peace & Security (GPS-SHaSA 2017 – implemented by more than 20 NSOs across Africa):

- To what degree do you think that politicians respond to the population's concerns and needs? To what degree do you think the national government takes the concerns of the following groups into account?
 - opposition parties
 - civil society organizations
 - local authorities
 - private sector

Central Statistical Organization (CSO), Myanmar – Governance Survey (2017):

- Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with this statement: I have no influence on what the Government does.

National Institute of Statistics (INS), Tunisia – National Survey on Citizen Perceptions on Security, Freedoms and Local Governance (2021):

- Do civil society organizations / labour unions / political parties have an influence over local policies in your region?
- To what extent would you say that the current political system in Tunisia makes it possible for your political opinion to influence policymaking by the government?

SDG 16.7.2 and *deliberative governance*

As mentioned in the first part of this brief, a host of more consultative and deliberative models have been developed over the past 25 years to promote dialogue between public authorities and populations on an ongoing basis.^{xxix} The shift towards deliberative governance approaches meant an increased focus on ensuring that the voice of those who have traditionally been silenced is heard while also promoting more active and evidence-based participation in decision-making processes.^{xxx}

Deliberative practices have also emerged against the backdrop of the increasing complexity of policymaking and the failure to find and/or implement solutions to some of the most pressing policy problems, ranging from climate change to decisions about infrastructure investment. This has forced politicians and policymakers to reflect on how collective public decisions should be taken in the 21st century.

Public authorities from all levels of government have therefore started to turn to "Citizens' Assemblies," "Citizens' Juries," "Deliberative Polls" and other representative deliberative decision-making processes to tackle complex policy problems (*see*

Box 7). They convene relatively small but representative groups of people for at least one full day – and often much longer – to learn, deliberate and develop collective recommendations. The main tenets of these deliberative processes are threefold:

1) A focus on **deliberation**, which entails carefully weighing different options, accessing a wide range of evidence and expertise reflecting a diversity of perspectives, and finding common ground to reach a group decision;

2) **Representativeness** of the participants (through stratified random selection) to ensure that the group broadly matches the profile of the community, using the census or other similar data, not only with respect to socio-demographic characteristics but also with respect to income, geography, education, religion and so on; and

3) **Impact**, meaning that decision-makers have to state in advance how they will act on the recommendations made by the group.^{xxxi}

The two aspects of decision-making that SDG 16.7.2 measures – "inclusiveness" and "responsiveness" – are therefore particularly relevant in the current context as they are closely aligned with the last two tenets of deliberative processes. "Inclusiveness"

speaks to the representativeness of participants while “responsiveness” looks more closely at “impact”. These qualities of decision-making have been found to be harder to integrate into traditional participatory processes, such as town halls or community meetings, which tend to attract those who are interested in an issue (i.e. not a representative sample), and which can leave participants frustrated by the lack of follow-through by decision-makers on the inputs they provided.^{xxxii}

The widespread use of these deliberative decision-making approaches across countries and across levels of government signals their universality and potential applicability in different national and local contexts. While SDG indicator 16.7.2 may not, on its own, point to any specific policy recommendation, policymakers looking to improve people’s assessment of the inclusiveness and responsiveness

of public institutions may be interested in these new approaches that aim to give people a meaningful role in public decision-making. However, they should also keep in mind some of the risks and challenges associated with these approaches, including the possibility that they could backfire when recommendations of deliberative groups are not fully taken into account.^{xxxiii} In addition, the broader political economy in which deliberative decision-making models are being adopted often matters for the outcome. The political environment and entrenched institutional interests can limit the space for participation, and a lack of ownership by political actors can mean that the success of deliberative decision-making models can be actively undermined.^{xxxiv}

Box 7. Examples of how deliberative decision-making models have been used around the world

- **Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly** was established in 2016 by the Irish parliament to deliberate on a number of sensitive issues, including gay marriage and abortion (which at the time was banned by the Irish Constitution). It involved 99 randomly selected citizen members, with a good balance of people in favour of the changes, some against and some undecided. Citizens’ Assembly members met 12 weekends over 18 months, and their proceedings were live-streamed. Based on the Assembly’s recommendations, the government called a referendum on amending the Constitution’s 8th amendment on abortion, which subsequently led to the repeal of the ban on abortion.
- A **deliberative poll** was used by **Japan’s** government in 2012 to consult public opinion on its nuclear power policies after the Fukushima Daiichi disaster. A random sample of 285 individuals was invited to participate in a weekend deliberative forum. Participants were polled before and after the forum in order to gauge whether any of them had changed their opinion as a result of the deliberation. At the forum, participants were provided with briefing materials, and they could question experts on the pros and cons of nuclear and other methods of power generation. In the final poll, support for the 0% nuclear energy policy rose from 32.6% (in the first poll) to 46.7% (in the second). This exercise led to a pledge by Japan’s national government to have 0% dependency on nuclear energy after 2030.
- In 2017, **Mongolia’s** government passed a law requiring that **deliberative polling** be used before amendments to the country’s Constitution could be made. That same year, the Mongolian parliament brought together 669 randomly selected citizens from across the country to Ulaanbaatar for a national deliberative poll on the future of the Constitution. After having learned about the strengths and weaknesses of a proposal to elect the President indirectly rather than directly, support

for this proposal dropped from 61.5% to 41%. This led to the removal of this proposal from the list considered by the parliament as part of the constitutional review, even though it had originally been supported by major political parties.

- In **England**, **Pandemic Data-Sharing Citizens' Juries** were convened online between March and May 2021 to discuss a host of ethical and legal questions arising from the widespread collection, storage and processing of health data and patient records during the COVID-19 pandemic. Across three juries of 18 adults each, a majority were in favour of continuing all the data-sharing initiatives for as long as they were valuable (potentially beyond the pandemic and for non-COVID-19 uses). The experience highlighted that public involvement in how data is used helps build transparency and trust that is not blind, but "informed, strong and sustained."
- In 2014, the City of Melbourne in **Australia** produced a 10-Year Financial Plan and mandated a **People's Panel** of 43 randomly selected Melburnians (residents and business owners) to make recommendations to the City Council on its spending and revenue strategy over the next decade. After having engaged with experts, senior bureaucrats and councillors to inform its recommendations, the People's Panel recommended increased funding to address climate change as well as expanding bicycle lanes and increasing footpath widths in certain areas. The Panel also recognized the need to raise tax rates and developer contributions to finance such longer-term investments – a decision that politicians had initially ruled out, fearing Melburnians' reactions.
- In **Colombia**, the Participatory Budget of Medellín has been officially embedded in the Municipal System of Planning since 2007. This ensures the widespread participation of citizens, who first meet in neighbourhood assemblies to discuss issues and generate a diagnosis of Local Development Plans. They also select delegates, whose decisions are then endorsed by the Local Action Board of each *comuna* and village for the Municipal Administration to include in the Annual Plan and for the City Council to approve. More recently, at the national level, the Grand National Conversation was initiated by the President of Colombia to allow citizens to make proposals around six topics: "growth with equity," "transparency and the fight against corruption," "education," "peace with legality," "the environment" and "strengthening institutions." In total, more than 13,000 proposals were uploaded.
- Since 2019, **Belgium** has established a **Citizens' Council** as a permanent representative deliberative body constituted by 24 randomly selected citizens deemed representative of the Ostbelgien population, with a one-and-a-half-year mandate. The Citizens' Council can initiate up to three *ad hoc* Citizens' Panels on pressing policy issues, whose recommendations are then submitted for parliamentary debate. The implementation of agreed-upon recommendations is then monitored by the Citizens' Council.
- The **Toronto Planning Review Panels** (2015-17 and 2017-19), in **Canada**, were created when the city government realised that its traditional consultation methods did not always allow it to hear equally from Toronto's many diverse communities in city planning processes. Panel members met for 11 full-day meetings in the course of their two-year mandate. Prior to deliberations, participants met for four days of learning from independent experts as well as city staff. The Panels were embedded into the city's planning division to enable ongoing public input on issues of planning and transportation.

Sources: OECD (2020), [Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions – Catching the Deliberative Wave – Highlights](#); Stanford Centre for Deliberative Democracy (2017), [Mongolia’s First National Deliberative Poll on Constitutional Amendments](#); Participate Melbourne (2015), [10-Year Financial Plan, Delivering on our vision for the city’s growth, prosperity and liveability](#); Centre for New Democratic Processes (2021), [Pandemic Data Sharing Citizens’ Juries](#); Participedia (2012), [Deliberative Poll on Japan’s Energy and Environmental Policy Options](#); Colombia Department of National Planning (2019), [Government initiates the Grand National Conversation](#); LATINNO, [Participatory Budget of Medellín](#); LATINNO, [Grand National Conversation](#).

What is next for measuring SDG 16.7.2?

As of 2022, countries will be invited to report on SDG indicator 16.7.2 on an annual basis. Countries will need to consider the integration of the two survey questions required to report on this indicator into ongoing surveys. As the custodian agency for SDG 16.7.2, UNDP is committed to continuing to raise awareness about the importance of ensuring inclusive and responsive decision-making and to support countries in enhancing inclusive and responsive political processes and institutions, for example by (*see Box 8 for examples of UNDP support in these areas at country level*):

- Supporting legal and policy reforms to enable the participation of all groups in society;
- Supporting meaningful civic engagement in all phases of policymaking, from political agenda-setting to decision-making;
- Advancing women’s equal participation and decision-making in political processes and institutions;
- Supporting the integration of deliberative processes in public decision-making including the use of digital tools that can enhance civic engagement;
- Strengthening civil society capacities for active participation and expanding spaces for civic engagement in political and public life, with a special focus on groups experiencing discrimination and marginalization, including persons with disabilities, LGBTI and Indigenous Peoples; and
- Developing global/regional comparative knowledge on approaches used to enhance civic engagement in public decision-making.

Box 8 – Examples of UNDP support on promoting inclusive and responsive decision-making

UNDP’s efforts in support of SDG 16.7.2 can take various forms, including supporting the creation of an enabling environment for citizen participation in decision-making and supporting the design of participatory and deliberative mechanisms that allow for inclusion and influence.

In [Armenia](#), UNDP worked with the Office of the Prime Minister to establish innovative mechanisms aimed at promoting direct democracy and open governance in the country, such as dedicated consultation spaces for citizen-government dialogue on laws, policies and sectoral development plans, and a “foresight mechanism” for collecting data on youth aspirations and dreams.

In [Cambodia](#), UNDP supported selected districts and municipalities in using a community participatory approach to design and implement solid waste management (SWM) services. This resulted in 61% of community members engaging in decision-making processes about SWM for their communities and in significantly boosting the share of citizen complaints on SWM services that are being addressed by local councillors and officials (from 40% in 2018 to 90% in 2020). This participatory model is now being considered by national policymakers for nationwide scaling-up.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, where youth are actively involved in ethnic and political conflicts during elections, UNDP is working with youth organizations and the government to enhance young citizens' participation in public decision-making and to establish a dialogue platform between youth from different political parties.

In **Bolivia**, as part of the implementation of indigenous autonomy (AIOC – Autonomía Indígena Originaria Campesina), UNDP supported the establishment of a democratic multicultural dialogue between autonomous entities, indigenous organizations and political and social actors. Particular efforts were made to ensure that women and youth were politically represented and involved in the socioeconomic development of the AIOC.

In **Kenya**, UNDP supported all 47 counties in establishing County Budget and Economic Forums (CBEFs), which provide a consultation platform on county plans and budgets between county officials and citizens. At this date, 14 county assemblies are engaging citizens in budgeting processes. UNDP Kenya also strengthened the capacity of CBEFs for inclusive budgeting, and in collaboration with the International Budget Partnership it supported 30 counties in publishing their budget information on their websites and other online channels in an effort to promote informed citizen participation in local budgeting discussions.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNDP is strengthening parliamentary democracy by making it more inclusive and responsive to the needs of citizens. To this end, UNDP supported the establishment of institutionalized dialogues and consultations led by selected parliamentary committees with local councils, civil society organizations and citizens. Accountability mechanisms have also been put in place, whereby sanctions are applied for inadequate consideration of people's needs by parliamentarians.

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The Oslo Governance Centre (OGC) is UNDP's dedicated Global Policy Centre for Governance issues. It leads on UNDP's custodian role on four SDG 16 indicators, including the methodological development and refinement of the indicators as well as technical support for global reporting.

For more information, please contact sdg16indicators@undp.org and see <https://www.undp.org/content/oslo-governance-centre/en/home.html>

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- ⁱ “While in the late 1960s, typically over 77% citizens voted in national legislative and presidential elections, the global average voting rate fell to 67% after 2010.” Quoted from Kostelka, F. and Blais, A. (2021). “The Generational and Institutional Sources of the Global Decline in Voter Turnout.” *World Politics*, 73(4), 629-667. <https://doi:10.1017/S0043887121000149>. In addition, a [2018 Pew Research Survey](#) conducted in 14 countries where a median of 78% say they have voted at least once in the past showed that other forms of political participation are much less common: a median of 33%, 27%, 17%, 14% and 12% have, respectively, attended a political campaign event or speech at least once, participated in volunteer organizations, posted comments on political issues online, participated in an organized protest or donated money to a social or political organization.
- ⁱⁱ “Mass protests increased annually by an average of 11.5 percent from 2009 to 2019 across all regions of the world ...”, quoted from Brannen, S., Haig, C. S. and Schmidt, K. (2020). “The Age of Mass Protests: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend.” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C. See also Ortiz, I. and Burke, S. (2022). *World protests: A study of key protest issues in the 21st Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, which shows that not only have the number of protests increased significantly since 2006, but that in recent years (since 2016), the main grievances have focused on the failure of political representation and the demand for civil rights.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Haerpfer, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., et al. (eds.), (2022). *World Values Survey: Round Seven - Country-Pooled Datafile Version 4.0*. Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute and WWSA Secretariat. doi:10.14281/18241.18
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