

Civic Participation, Political Trust, and Political Self-Efficacy in Latvia

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Civic participation is a cornerstone of democratic societies, yet the underlying psychological and political factors that promote or hinder it remain a subject of scholarly debate. This study explores the relationships among civic participation, political trust, and political self-efficacy in Latvia to understand how individuals engage in civic activities. Drawing on a representative sample of 1005 Latvian residents aged 18 to 75 ($M = 46.34$, $SD = 14.9$), this research investigates how different forms of political self-efficacy and trust predict various types of civic participation.

The study was conducted as part of the national research program “Values in Action: promotion of responsible, secure and educated civil society in Latvia through research and model development” and data was collected via a survey in August and September 2020. Civic participation was operationalised through a comprehensive 30-item scale developed for this project, measuring behaviours ranging from electoral participation to political consumerism, NGO involvement, and social media activism. Factor analysis identified eight distinct types of civic participation.

Regression analyses were conducted to determine the predictive value of sociodemographic variables (sex, age, education), satisfaction with life, general and political trust, and three forms of political self-efficacy (internal-personal, internal-collective, external-collective). Results indicate that political self-efficacy, especially internal-personal and internal-collective self-efficacy, is the strongest predictor of civic participation in most behavioural domains. Political trust alone was not a significant direct predictor, but patterns suggest its indirect influence through beliefs related to efficacy.

Specifically, internal-personal political self-efficacy significantly predicted behaviours such as engaging with politicians, joining NGOs, political activism, and political consumerism, with standardised regression coefficients ranging from $\beta = 0.13^*$ to $\beta = 0.30^{***}$. Internal-collective political efficacy significantly predicted electoral participation and social engagement ($\beta = 0.26^{***}$). General self-efficacy also contributed to predicting certain forms of participation, such as involvement with NGOs. Although political trust did not consistently emerge as a direct factor, its correlations with efficacy variables propose a mediating relationship that merits further testing.

Demographic factors showed modest but consistent effects. Older participants were more likely to vote and contact officials, while higher educational attainment predicted participation in voting, political consumerism, and involvement with NGOs. Gender differences were also observed, and men were more likely to engage in institutional and expressive forms of participation, including political activism and digital participation.

The findings underscore the importance of political self-efficacy as a central driver of civic engagement in Latvia. Interventions to improve citizens' sense of personal and collective political influence through civic education, participatory experiences, and transparent institutional practices could strengthen democratic involvement. Future analyses will employ mediation models to test whether political self-efficacy is an explanatory mechanism between political trust and civic participation.

In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding Latvia's civic participation by empirically validating political self-efficacy's central role. It highlights the nuanced interplay between trust, self-efficacy, and civic involvement and offers practical implications for policymakers and educators aiming to foster engaged citizens.

Keywords

civic participation, political trust, political self-efficacy