

ESS Round 8 Question Design Template – New Core Items

Political Efficacy

These items were developed by researchers at ESS ERIC HQ and Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), drawing on proposals originally put forward by Saris and Torcal (2009).

Aim
<p>To develop new measures of political efficacy for the ESS core questionnaire.</p> <p>It is widely acknowledged that political efficacy comprises two distinct dimensions: system responsiveness i.e. as the individual's belief in the responsiveness of the political system and subjective competence i.e. the perception of the individual ability to understand politics and to act politically.</p> <p>The questionnaire for Rounds 1-5 of the ESS included measures of subjective competence but not system responsiveness. The decision was taken to improve the ESS' measurement of political efficacy by developing items to cover both dimensions of political efficacy.</p> <p>Alternative versions of the political efficacy questions were tested in ESS Round 7 before a final selection of items to add to the core questionnaire was made for ESS Round 8.</p>

SECTION A. Theoretical rationale
Why is the topic important? How will including items on this topic in the ESS enhance our understanding of public attitudes and behaviours across Europe?
<p>The concept of political efficacy has long played an important role in studies of political behaviour. It can be defined as the "feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954, p.187). Since the seminal studies of Campbell, Gurin and Miller (1954) and Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960), the political efficacy construct has been regarded both as an important predictor of political participation (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982) and as a positive outcome of participation (Finkel, 1985). High levels of efficacy among citizens are regarded as desirable for democratic stability. Individuals that are confident about their ability to influence the actions of their government are more likely to support the democratic system (Easton, 1965). Questions concerning political efficacy are asked in nearly all National Election studies.</p> <p>There are two dimensions to political efficacy. Subjective competence, or internal efficacy, can be defined as the confidence of the individual in his or her own abilities to understand politics and to act politically. System responsiveness, or external efficacy, can be defined as the individual's belief in the responsiveness of the political system (Lane 1959; Converse 1972; Balch 1974). More recently, it has been shown that these two dimensions are highly distinct and have different relationships with other variables (Saris and Torcal, 2009). These relationships are described further in Section B.</p>

SECTION B. Relationship with other variables in ESS questionnaire

Are the items intended to be used primarily as explanatory/background variables or is the topic primarily of interest as a dependent variable?

Political efficacy is strongly related to other concepts which form part of the ESS core questionnaire. It has been considered both a pre-requisite for and a consequence of satisfaction with democracy, perceived political influence, political trust or engagement in political activities.

Importantly, system responsiveness and subjective competence have been shown to be differently related to other aspects of political behaviour. System responsiveness is very often seen as a correlate of political and social trust and government evaluations (e.g., Abramson and Finifter 1981; Niemi et al., 1991). Subjective competence is frequently considered to be correlated with other variables such as political participation, political interest and political knowledge (Niemi et al., 1991). Both dimensions of political efficacy are also seen as important prerequisites for political engagement, including voting in national elections. (Condon & Holleque, 2013; Finkel, 1985; Vecchione & Caprara 2009).

SECTION C. Potential methodological or practical difficulties

Provide brief details of any potential methodological or practical difficulties associated with asking about this topic on a face to face cross-national survey

The political efficacy items have undergone significant development and testing to test that they provide distinct measures of the two dimensions of political efficacy and that the items are, as far as possible, measurement invariant across countries. Further information on the items' development can be found in Saris and Torcal (2009) and Saris and Revilla (2012).

SECTION D. Measurement

CONCEPT: System responsiveness

System responsiveness refers to the individual's belief in the responsiveness of the political system, that is the extent to which people think that politicians and/or political institutions will listen to and/act on the opinions of ordinary citizens.

Expected relationship with other concepts

System responsiveness is expected to be correlated with political and social trust and government evaluations, even though the causal direction is unclear (Finkel, 1985; Quintilier & Hooghe, 2012). Higher levels of system responsiveness are also expected to be associated with higher levels of political participation, including voting in elections.

Final question wording

B2 CARD 5 How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?

- Not at all 1
- Very little 2
- Some 3
- A lot 4
- A great deal 5

- (Refusal) 7
- (Don't know) 8

B4 CARD 7 And how much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics?

- Not at all 1
- Very little 2
- Some 3
- A lot 4
- A great deal 5

- (Refusal) 7
- (Don't know) 8

CONCEPT: Subjective competence

Subjective competence can be defined as the confidence or belief that an individual has in his or her own abilities to understand politics and to participate in the political process.

Expected relationship with other concepts

Subjective competence is expected to be correlated with political interest. Higher levels of subjective competence are also expected to be associated with higher levels of political participation, including voting in elections.

Final question wording

B3 CARD 6 How able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues?

- Not at all able¹ 1
- A little able 2
- Quite able 3
- Very able 4
- Completely able 5

- (Refusal) 7
- (Don't know) 8

¹ 'Not at all able' in the sense of 'having no chance of being able to take an active role'

B5 CARD 8 And how confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?

- Not at all confident² 1
- A little confident 2
- Quite confident 3
- Very confident 4
- Completely confident 5

- (Refusal) 7
- (Don't know) 8

² 'Not at all confident' in the sense of 'having no confidence at all in your own ability'

SECTION E. References

Please provide full references for any studies mentioned in the template below

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- Vecchione, M., & Caprara, G. V. (2009). Personality determinants of political participation: The contribution of traits and self-efficacy beliefs. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 46(4), 487-492. DOI: [10.1016/j.paid.2008.11.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2008.11.021)