

Over half a million Finns would be keen to participate more in decision-making if it were easier

Finnish democracy has been a success story. Year after year, Finland has held top positions in international rankings on such things as human rights and transparent governance. However, the OECD's Trust Report from 2021 revealed that Finns' confidence in their possibilities to influence decision-making is very low – considering the high level of trust Finns otherwise express towards democratic institutions.

The survey *Opportunities for democratic participation in Finland* by the Finnish Innovation Fund *Sitra*, further studied how Finns currently participate in decision-making and how citizens would like to participate at different levels of government. This paper summarises the main results of the survey and presents a democracy indicator created particularly for this study.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Decision-makers and public officials do not trust the public's ability to engage in political debate on complex issues**

Only 19% of decision-makers and 14% of officials agree with the statement "in general, citizens have sufficient capacity to participate in the debate on complex policy decisions".

2. **Decision-making should be brought closer to everyday life**

A third of citizens hardly ever participate in influencing decision-making, and more than half of Finns think that decision-makers push their own agendas at the cost of the voters, political rhetoric is distancing citizens from decision-making and only one in six feel that participation in public decision making is easy.

3. **Decision-makers' and citizens' perceptions of attractive participation methods diverge**

Decision-makers and citizens prefer different types of participation methods. The key finding is that people want to participate online, but decision-makers would prefer people to interact face-to-face. Only 14% of decision-makers would like to promote signing an online petition as a way to promote participation, while 68% of citizens would consider participating in decision-making in this way.

4. **Policy-makers support more open communication with citizens**

Policy-makers are willing to engage in more depth with citizens and to communicate more openly about decision-making. 77% of political decision-makers say that interaction with citizens in the context of decision-making is agreeable. More open communication with citizens at all stages of the decision-making process is supported by 85% of elected representatives and 65% of civil servants.



CONCLUSIONS

Over half a million Finns would be keen to participate more in decision-making if it were easier. To increase citizen participation, decision-making at all stages should be more openly communicated to the public. There is also a big demand for easy and digital ways to participate and for opportunities to influence decision-makers directly.

THE DEMOCRACY INDICATOR – PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING IN FINNISH REGIONS

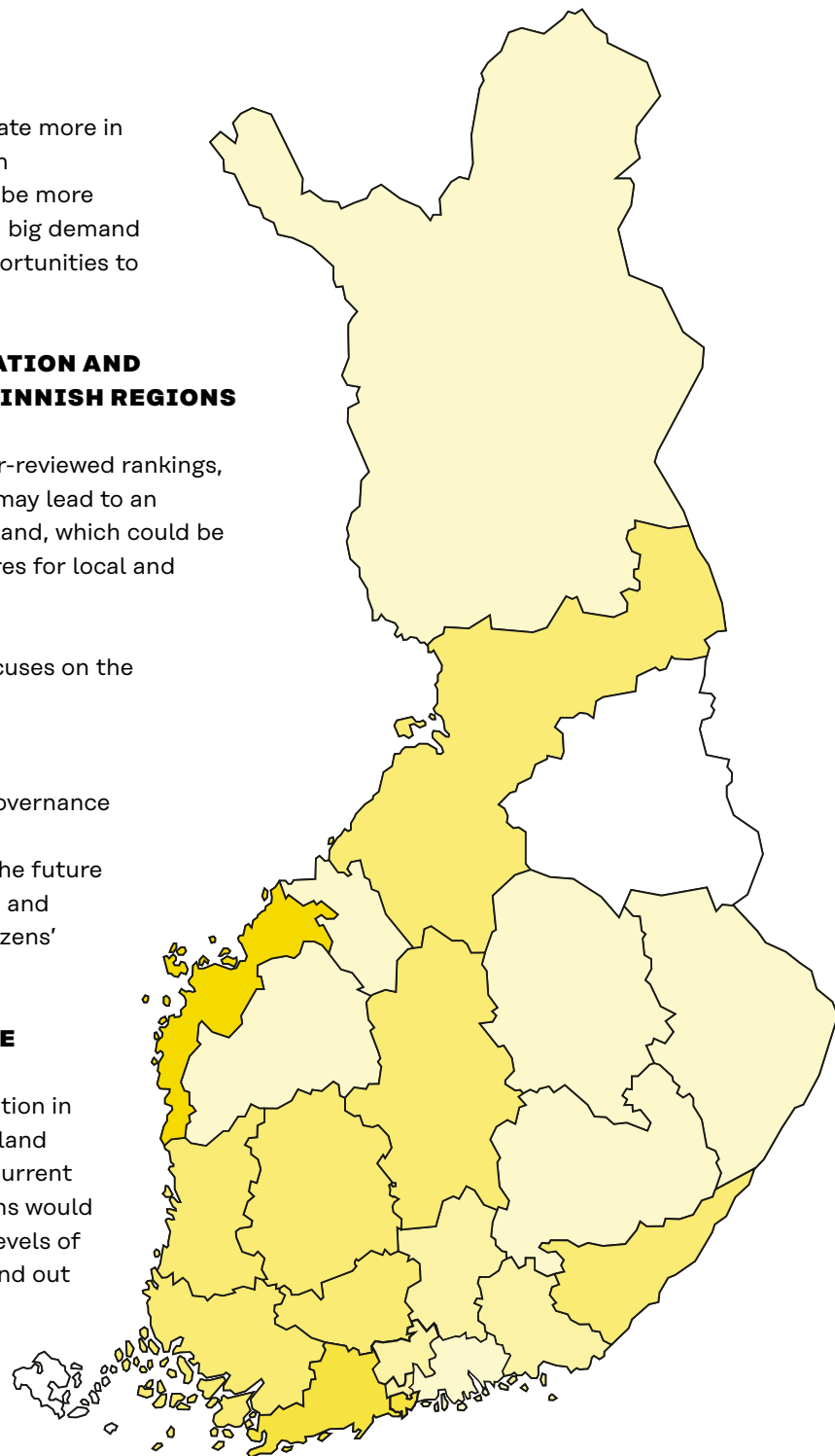
Democracy is often measured by international peer-reviewed rankings, in which Finland has been placed very highly. This may lead to an underestimation of regional differences within Finland, which could be used as a basis for developing appropriate structures for local and regional participation in decision-making.

We have created an indicator for the study that focuses on the following factors:

- voter turnout in municipal elections
- voter turnout in parliamentary elections
- perceived empowerment at different levels of governance
- identified models of participation
- perceptions and evaluations of participation in the future
- whether decision-makers promote participation, and
- whether decision-makers have confidence in citizens' abilities and capabilities to participate

ABOUT THE SURVEY AND HOW IT WAS DONE

The Survey Opportunities for democratic participation in Finland shows how people aged 15–79 living in Finland currently participate in decision-making, how the current scope for participation is perceived and how citizens would like to participate in decision-making at different levels of government. The second aim of the study was to find out the willingness and ability of public officials and elected representatives to facilitate and extend democratic participation in Finland. A comparative framework has been constructed from surveys of citizens and decision-makers to illustrate regional and demographic differences in democratic participation at national level and at welfare service county level.



Democracy indicator by regions.
Darker shades of yellow indicate higher scores.

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