Measuring the Quality of Government at the Sub-National Level and Comparing Results with Previous Studies:

Final Technical Report & Select Case Studies in Spain and Poland

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1 Introduction: Part I

This document presents the latest of four rounds of the EQI data on regional governance in EU countries (Charron, Dijkstra, and Lapuente, 2014; Charron, Dijkstra, and Lapuente, 2015; Charron, Lapuente, and Rothstein, 2013; Charron, Lapuente, and Annoni, 2019. While this round of data largely builds on the work of previous rounds, there are several alterations based on suggestions from a Rasch analysis of the 2010, and 2013 rounds of the EQI data (Annoni and Charron, 2019), as well as an expanded number of regions and several small adjustments based on the Covid-19 situation. In this document, we highlight the sample, summary statistics and question items that are included in the 2020 round of the EQI. Together with national estimates from the World Bank Governance Indicators (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 2009), we report data on Quality of Government ('QoG') for all EU 27 countries and for NUTS 2 regions for all available EU countries (save Germany and Belgium at NUTS 1), totaling 209 regions. The QoG questions are aimed at capturing average citizens' perceptions and experiences with corruption, and the extent to which they rate their public services as impartial and of good quality.

In addition, we highlight broad patterns as we see them in the data and, more specifically, analyse trends in the EQI over time within regions. Using several statistical and observational techniques, we elucidate a list of potentially interesting case studies that can be undertaken to better draw out 'best practices' to improve governance at the sub-national level in other EU regions.

2 Background, Methodology and Sample

Initially, our fieldwork was scheduled for March/April of 2020. However, the Covid-19 pandemic that struck all of the Eurozone at this time, causing much disruption and uncertainty, led to a delay. In lieu of the full sample, we fielded a pilot survey in June of 2020. Our main inquiry was whether the pandemic had a noticeable effect on responses compared with previous years. In addition, 2020 is the first year in which the survey includes online administration for some (50%) of the respondents. We thus sought to better understand the differences between the traditional telephone replies and the online responses. We provide an analysis of the pilot here in this report (see Appendix).

The field work for the full sample began during the month of October, 2020 and concluded in the first week of February 2021. Interviews were conducted in the local majority language in each country/region. The results were returned to the Quality of Government Institute in February, 2021.

The E.U. regional survey was undertaken by Efficience 3 (E3), a French market-research, survey company specialising in public opinion throughout Europe for researchers, politicians and advertising firms. E3 has also conducted the 2010, 2013 and 2017 rounds of the EQI and were thus familiar with the question format and goals of the survey. E3 conducted the interviews themselves in several countries and used sub-contracting partners in others. The respondents, from 18 years of age or older, were contacted randomly via telephone in the local language. Computer Assisted Telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted via both landlines and mobile phones, with both methods being used in most countries. Decisions about whether to contact residents more often via land or mobile lines were based on the local expertise of market research firms in each country. Online interviews were also included this year as a compliment to the traditional CATI interviews, thus increasing access to certain demographic groups (namely younger people) and increasing the sample size significantly compared to previous years. Moreover, for the first time, all EU countries, including even the smaller member states, are included in the survey. For purposes of regional placement, respondents were asked the post code of their address to verify the area/ region of residence if mobile phones were used, or if they were an online respondent.

Ideally, a survey would be a mirror image of actual societal demographics – gender, income, education, rural-urban, ethnicity, etc. However, we are not privy to exact demographic distributions; in particular at the regional level in most cases, thus imposing artificial demographic lines might lead to even more problems than benefits. For our CATI sample, we thus sought the next best solution. To achieve a random, representative sample, based on their expert advice we used what is known in survey-research as the 'next birthday method'. The next birthday method is an alternative to the so-called quotas method. When using the quota method for instance, one obtains a (near)

perfectly representative sample – e.g. a near exact proportion of the amount of men, women, certain minority groups, people of a certain age, income, etc. However, as one searches for certain demographics within the population, one might end up with only 'available' respondents, or those that are more 'eager' to respond to surveys, which can lead to less variation in the responses, or even bias in the results. The 'next-birthday' method, which simply requires the interviewer to ask the person who answers the phone who in their household will have the next birthday, still obtains a reasonably representative sample of the population. The interviewer must take the person who has the next coming birthday in the household (if this person is not available, the interviewer makes an appointment), thus not relying on whomever might simply be available to respond in the household. So, where the quota method is stronger in terms of a more even demographic spread in the sample, the next-birthday method is stronger at ensuring a better range of opinion. The next-birthday method was thus chosen because we felt that what we might have lost in demographic representation in the sample would be made up for by a better distribution of opinion. With respect to the online sample, for reasons of access, a random sample is not possible, thus the standard quota method was employed, based on gender, age and education demographics at the NUTS 2 regional level.

Along with the CATI sample, we add online respondents to the 2020 EQI survey. In addition to the added value of lower costs and reaching a wider group of younger respondents that would not otherwise answer their mobile phones, the online administration is of particular interest for a topic such as the EQI, where sensitive questions about perceptions and experiences with corruption, for example, could be affected by social desirability biases from interviewer-administered surveys, such as face-to-face or over a telephone. In other words, respondents are more likely to answer truthfully about such sensitive topics when taking self-administered surveys, thus providing more accurate data (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau, 2008; Heerwegh, 2009). In contrast to the telephone interviews where respondents are randomly contacted, these respondents participate voluntarily. To increase the online sample, E3 worked with local partners to create a multi-channel communication of online and off-line networks to recruit potential respondents. These channels include using banners on various portals and websites, email recruitment via panel owner's databases, newsletters, brand communications, loyalty website and social media platforms. The firm also actively recruited via telephone and face-to-face interactions. All survey email invitations included a general description of the survey, confidentiality and anonymity statements, for panel members, the opportunity to unsubscribe or opt-out of future research; and an appropriate privacy policy or statement. As randomization via this administration was not possible as with CATI, the quota system was employed, based on age, gender and education characteristics of each region.

In addition, to compensate for some key demographic over/under-representation upon receiving the final sample, E3 provides weights based on age, gender and education for each region, comparing the sample drawn to actual demographic statistics from the latest figures provided by Eurostat.

This is done for both the CATI and online sample, which we could use to calculate an individual weight for each individual in the sample. By the end of the study, we found variation in the response and refusal rates by country, that could be the result of with many factors including the sensitivity of one of the primary the topics at hand – corruption. A breakdown of the sample is listed in Table 1 below by country.

Two issues in the preparation of this study are worthy of mention here. First, in some areas, such as immigration, customs, defence or the judicial arena, we do not expect much variation from region to region within countries at all. Thus to maximize regional variation on the QoG-oriented question in the survey, we elected to limit the questions in the survey to only those policy areas that are most often either governed or administered by sub-national bodies. In the end, three policy areas were selected – health care, education and law enforcement. In addition to these three policy areas, we also inquire about the integrity of regional elections.

The second issue to deal with is the fact that in some countries – such as Germany, Belgium, Italy or Spain – the regions that we are targeting in the questions are both politically and administratively meaningful. That is to say that these regional governments are elected by their local constituents, and have their own autonomous revenues (either from directly taxing citizens, or central government transfers or both) and have a degree of autonomy with which to redistribute resources in the form of public services. Other countries might have *some* regions that are politically meaningful - for example, in Finland (Åland), Portugal (Azores and Madeira), or Czech Republic (Prague, Moravskoslezsko and Střední Čechy) - yet others sampled in these countries are not at the most politically relevant level. In a third group of countries, e.g. more politically centralised countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia or Sweden, this issue becomes even more challenging. The regions that we are targeting (NUTS 1 or NUTS 2), while meaningful in the sense that EU development funds are targeted directly to them and that Eurostat reports annual data on them, they have in some cases been mainly an invention for EU statistical purposes, and none are politically meaningful. Therefore, in some cases, asking a respondent in some cases 'how would you rate the quality of "'X"' service in your region of "'Y"' might be very confusing, since respondents from countries like Hungary or Romania might not recognise that they are even living in region 'Y'. It can therefore be argued that the administrative and political responsibility of the regions in these three public services selected varies in different countries and thus this may be problematic for this data gathering. However this study argues otherwise, in that we attempt to capture all regional variation within a country and, as several other scholars have noted (e.g. Tabellini, 2010; Charron and Lapuente, 2013), there are numerous empirical indications and some anecdotal evidence pointing to the fact that the provision and quality of public services, even if controlled by a powerful central government can nonetheless largely vary across different regions. To synthesise the survey and make the results as comparable between and within countries as possible, we asked respondents about their public services *'in their area.'*

Table 1: Sample by Country

Country	NUTS regions	targeted n per NUT	total respondents	% sample
Germany[1]	38 (16)	500	19,293	14.84
Romania	8	500	4,168	3.21
Italy	21	600	12,907	9.93
Austria	9	500	4,516	3.47
Poland[2]	17	600	10,559	8.12
Spain	17	600	10,409	8.01
Sweden[3]	8	500	4,077	3.14
Finland	5	500	2,496	1.92
Denmark	5	500	2,555	1.97
Ireland	3	500	1,507	1.16
Belgium[4]	11 (3)	500	5,713	4.39
Netherlands	12	500	6,163	4.74
Hungary[5]	8	500	4,083	3.14
Slovakia	4	500	2,081	1.60
Croatia	2	500	1,039	0.80
Bulgaria	6	500	3,082	2.37
France[6]	27	500	13,292	10.23
Czech Republic	8	500	4,948	3.81
Portugal	7	500	3,575	2.75
Greece[7]	13	500	6,842	5.26
Luxembourg	1	500	520	0.40
Estonia	1	1000	1,066	0.82
Latvia	1	1000	1,038	0.80
Lithuania[8]	2	1000	2,039	1.57
Slovenia	2	500	1,016	0.78
Malta[9]	1	500	505	0.39
Cyprus[10]	1	500	502	0.39

[1]Sampled at NUTS 2 level, but for purposes of continuity with past years, the EQI data is reported at NUTS 1
[2]NUTS 2 increased from 16 to 17
[3]Sampled at NUTS 2 from NUTS 1 previously
[4]Sampled at NUTS 2 level, but for purposes of continuity with past years, the EQI data is reported at NUTS 1
[5]NUTS 2 increased from 7 to 8
[6]For overseas regions, online unavailable, CATI sample only
[7]Sampled at NUTS 2 from NUTS 1 previously
[8]Sampled at NUTS 2 from NUTS 1 previously
[9]Online unavailable, CATI sample only
[10]Online unavailable, CATI sample only

Table 2 reports the basic demographic distributions of the total sample and by survey administration. On the whole, we see little difference by survey administration with respect to gender or employment status. Yet we observe a clear trade-off in age, education and population of residence, in which the CATI respondents are older, more rural and lower educated than the online respondents, which is quite consistent with previous research on hybrid studies[11]. . As noted, post-stratification weights will be included to comport the sample distribution with the population distributions on gender, age and education.

Table 2: Sample Demographics: Total and by Survey Administration

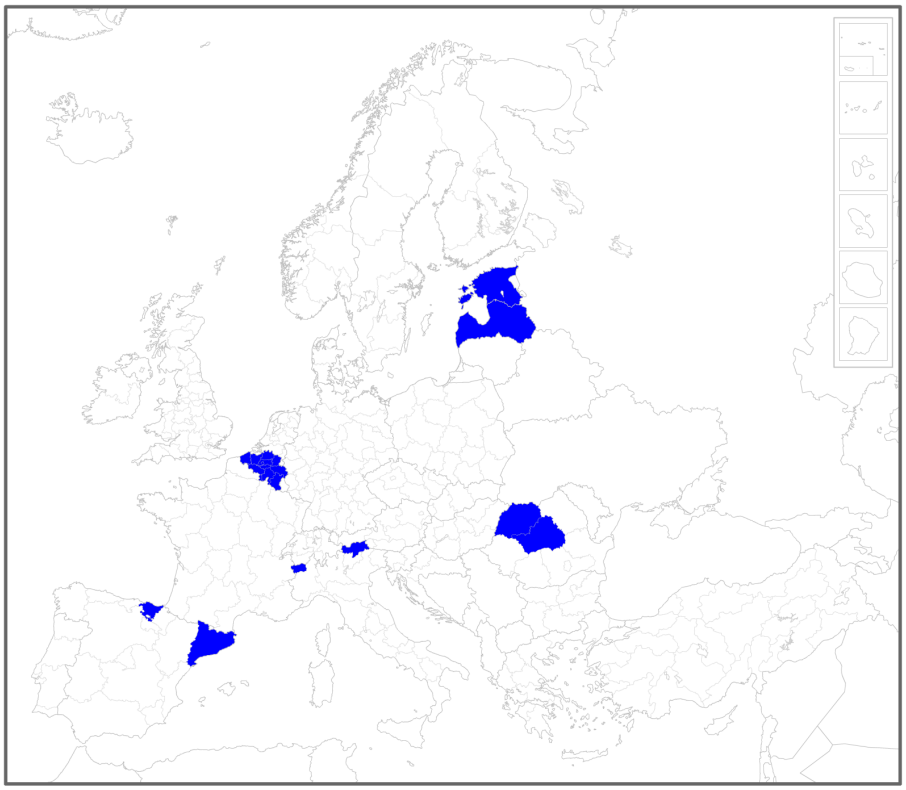
Variable	**CATI**	**Online**	**Total**
Female	51.5	51.7	51.6
Male	48.5	48.3	48.4
Age: 18-29	16.8	20.5	18.6
Age: 30-49	34.9	38.5	36.7
Age: 50-64	25.6	25.2	25.4
Age: 65+	22.5	15.6	19.1
Education: < secondary	27.6	11.8	19.8
Education: secondary	38.4	39.0	38.7
Education: tertiary or >	33.9	49.2	41.4
Population: <10k	34.1	28.1	31.1
Population: 10k - 100k	37.1	38.4	37.8
Population: 100k - 1m	18.8	23.2	21.0
Population: >1m	5.2	6.9	6.1
Employment: Public sec.	19.2	19.0	19.1
Employment: Private sec.	40.9	42.8	41.8
Employment: Not working	38.7	33.0	35.9

[11] see for example: https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2015/05/13/from-telephone-to-the-web-the-challenge-of-mode-of-interview-effects-in-public-opinion-polls/

Finally, new to this year, we offered a wider scope of language choice to respondents living in areas with significant and sizeable language diversity.. The regions and languages are as follows:

- Belgium (all regions, BE): French and Dutch
- Pais Vasco (ES21): Basque and Spanish
- Cataluña (ES51): Catalan and Spanish
- Valle d'Aosta (ITC2): French and Italian
- Bolzano/Bozen (ITH1): German and Italian
- Nord Vest, Centru (RO11 and RO12): Hungarian and Romanian
- Estonia (EE): Estonian and Russian
- Latvia (LV): Latvian and Russian

Figure 1: **Areas in which Multiple Languages are Offered**



3 2020 Survey Question Items

Several empirical (based on Annoni and Charron, 2019) and conceptual improvements were made to the question items in the EQI index in 2017 that are continued here. In sum, two key changes were been made. First, the question scale has been changed. In previous years we used an odd-numbered 11 point scale. However, we found that the '5' response (mid-point) was overused and might lead to misleading results. An even '10 point' scale was subsequently employed to maintain the variation of a larger scale but to eliminate the middle category which may at times have been representing 'don't know'. We continue this in 2020. Second, two questions from the 2013 round were removed due to poor performance, and three others were added, for a total of 17 question items (compared with 16 in the first two rounds). In this year's set of questions, we adjusted the question on corruption in elections on the basis of the poor performance of the previous wording elucidated from a Rasch analysis of the 2017 data.

We begin however by highlighting the 'core' questions that have remained in the three rounds of the survey over time. First, in question 4-6 in the current survey, respondents rate the quality of their three public services in question on a scale of '1' (extremely poor quality) to '10' (extremely high quality):

Q4. How would you rate the quality of public education in your area?

Q5. How would you rate the quality of the public health care system in your area?

Q6. How would you rate the quality of the police force in your area?

The next six questions try to capture the extent to which public services are delivered impartially in the regions of Europe. 'Impartiality' is admittedly a more complicated concept to put forth to respondents than 'quality', so we framed this question in two ways – with a more negative tone and a more positive tone. In the first three questions (7-9), we asked citizens to rate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree) whether they agreed that 'certain people' get special advantages when dealing with the public service in question. The second set of questions (10-12), asks respondents on a four point scale (1. Agree, 2. Rather Agree, 3. Rather Disagree or 4. Disagree) whether all people in their region are 'treated equally' by the service in question. We used all six questions in the final index to allow for as much variation as possible while not letting either the 'positively' or 'negatively' framed question alone determine the impartiality data.

Q7. "Certain people are given special advantages in the public education system in my area."

Q8. "Certain people are given special advantages in the public health care system in my area."

Q9. "The police force gives special advantages to certain people in my area."

Please respond to the following 4 questions with 'Agree, rather agree, rather disagree or Disagree'

Q10. "All citizens are treated equally in the public education system in my area."

Q11. "All citizens are treated equally in the public health care system in my area."

Q12. "All citizens are treated equally by the police force in my area."

The next question, on elections, has been re-phrased as follows:

Q13. "In the area where I live, elections are conducted freely and fairly."

The next three questions deal with respondents' perception of the extent to which corruption is present in their public services, along with two general questions about how often they believe that 'others in their area' use corruption to obtain public services. Again, perceptions may not capture the full story, but, as Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2009) argue, 'perceptions matter because agents base their actions on their perceptions, impression, and views', thus, if citizens believe their public services to be inefficient or corrupt, they are less likely to use these services. Likewise with foreign firms and investment in countries perceived to be plagued with problems of rent-seeking and public sector mismanagement. However, we complemented these questions with additional questions about respondents' actual experience with bribery later on. The perceptions questions are scaled as 1-10, with '1' being 'strongly disagree' and '10' being 'strongly agree'. In addition, we defined the concept of corruption for the respondents to provide a baseline of common understanding, which we expected to give additional comparative validity to these items. The respondents thus heard/saw the following:

In this survey, we define corruption to mean 'the abuse of entrusted public power for private gain'. This 'abuse' could be by any public employee or politician and the 'private gain' might include money, gifts or other benefits.

Q14. "Corruption is prevalent in my area's local public school system."

Q15. "Corruption is prevalent in the public health care system in my area."

Q16. "Corruption is prevalent in the police force in my area."

The following two questions were added in 2017. Here, instead of asking citizens about either

'how often others engage in bribery to obtain public services' (2010), or asking respondents about corruption for 'special advantages' (2013), we split these ideas of so called 'need' and 'greed' corruption (see Bauhr, 2017) into the following two questions (1-10, with '1' being "strongly disagree" and '10' being "strongly agree"):

Q17a. "People in my area must use some form of corruption to just to get some basic public services."

Q17b. "Corruption in my area is used to get access to special unfair privileges and wealth."

In addition to the corruption perception questions, we asked about citizens' direct experience with corruption. In contrast to 2010 and 2013, where we only inquired about whether a respondent paid a bribe for one of the public services in question, we followed the 2017 survey and inquired whether the respondent was asked to pay a bribe by a public sector employee in one of the services in question, as well as whether they paid, so as to attempt to capture the direction of who is the 'initiator'. For the final index, we coded a respondent as '1' for Q17 or 18 if they answered 'yes' to any of the four sub-questions.

Q18. In the last 12 months, have you or anyone in your family been asked by a public official to give an informal gift or bribe in (1=yes, 2=No, 99=DK/refuse):

(a) Schools or other education services?

(b) Health or medical services?

(c) Police authorities?

(d) Any other government-run agency?

Q19. In the last 12 months, have you or anyone in your family given an informal gift or paid a bribe to (1=yes, 2=No, 99=DK/refuse):

(a) Schools or other education services?

(b) Health or medical services?

(c) Police authorities?

(d) Any other government-run agency?

4 Construction of the 2021 EQI

As with the three previous rounds, we began by taking the country average from the World Bank's 'World Governance Indicators' (WGI) data for four indicators: 'control of corruption', 'government effectiveness', 'rule of law' and 'voice and accountability', which served as national estimates around which the regional estimates were placed . The data was taken for the most recent year of publication (in this case 2019). We began by standardising each WGI measure for the EU 27 sample. This figure was used as a country's mean score in the EQI for all the countries in the sample so as to combine those countries outside the survey with those in it, as well as to 'anchor' the regional QoG estimates in a national context that is not captured by the regionally-based survey questions.

Table 3 shows the results of the latest national level WGI scores by country and indicator. The countries are in rank order and grouped together based on the result of a cluster analysis of the grouped together countries that were most similar on the four individual WGI indicators.[12]. The scores were then added together (equal weighting) and then standardised within the sample of 30 European countries. As a point of reference, we also provided the rank-change from the 2017 EQI (which used 2015 WGI data)

We see five cluster groups in the data. Again, we observe a 'top' cluster of northern/Western EU member states, followed by a second group of mainly older member states. The one exception is Estonia, which is the only new member state in the top two groups. The most difficult distinctions were Greece and Hungary, which, depending on cut-off levels, could have belonged to either group 4 or 5. We can observe that the rank order of countries has not changed significantly for most of the states in the sample, as most changes are only 1-2 places. Notable exceptions are Malta and Cyprus, which fell six and three places, respectively, and Slovenia, Spain and Lithuania, which climbed three, three and four places in the EU27 rankings, respectively. In addition, Hungary and Croatia have now entered the bottom group, which Romania and Bulgaria had consistently occupied among the EU27 countries in the first three rounds.

[12]Wards linkage and squared Euclidean distancing

Table 3: Country Level Governance Indicators and Rankings

Country	CC	RL	GE	VA	AVE.	2017 rank	Diff.	Group
FI	2.15	2.02	1.93	1.59	1.92	1	0	1
DK	2.11	1.9	1.94	1.58	1.88	3	1	1
SE	2.12	1.91	1.83	1.59	1.86	2	-1	1
NL	2.00	1.81	1.80	1.56	1.79	4	0	1
LU	2.11	1.79	1.73	1.52	1.79	5	0	1
DE	1.90	1.62	1.59	1.34	1.61	6	0	2
AT	1.55	1.88	1.49	1.33	1.56	8	1	2
IE	1.46	1.39	1.28	1.34	1.37	7	-1	2
BE	1.55	1.36	1.03	1.37	1.33	9	0	2
FR	1.30	1.41	1.38	1.14	1.31	10	0	2
EE	1.54	1.28	1.17	1.21	1.30	11	0	2
PT	0.76	1.14	1.15	1.24	1.07	12	0	3
SI	0.91	1.12	1.08	1.01	1.03	16	3	3
LT	0.68	1.02	1.04	1.02	0.94	15	1	3
ES	0.65	0.98	1.00	1.09	0.93	18	3	3
LT	0.48	1.01	1.11	0.88	0.87	20	4	3
CY	0.60	0.76	0.99	1.08	0.86	14	-3	3
CZ	0.51	1.05	0.89	0.94	0.85	17	-1	3
MT	0.24	0.95	0.86	1.11	0.79	13	-6	3
SK	0.33	0.56	0.67	0.91	0.62	21	1	4
PL	0.60	0.45	0.6	0.70	0.59	19	-2	4
IT	0.24	0.28	0.47	0.98	0.49	22	0	4
EL	-0.01	0.20	0.41	0.94	0.39	25	2	4
HR	0.13	0.37	0.41	0.53	0.36	24	0	5
HU	-0.01	0.49	0.50	0.22	0.30	23	-2	5
BG	-0.16	0.04	0.34	0.38	0.15	27	1	5
RO	-0.13	0.36	-0.28	0.49	0.11	26	-1	5

Table 4: Summary of Regional EQI Indicators

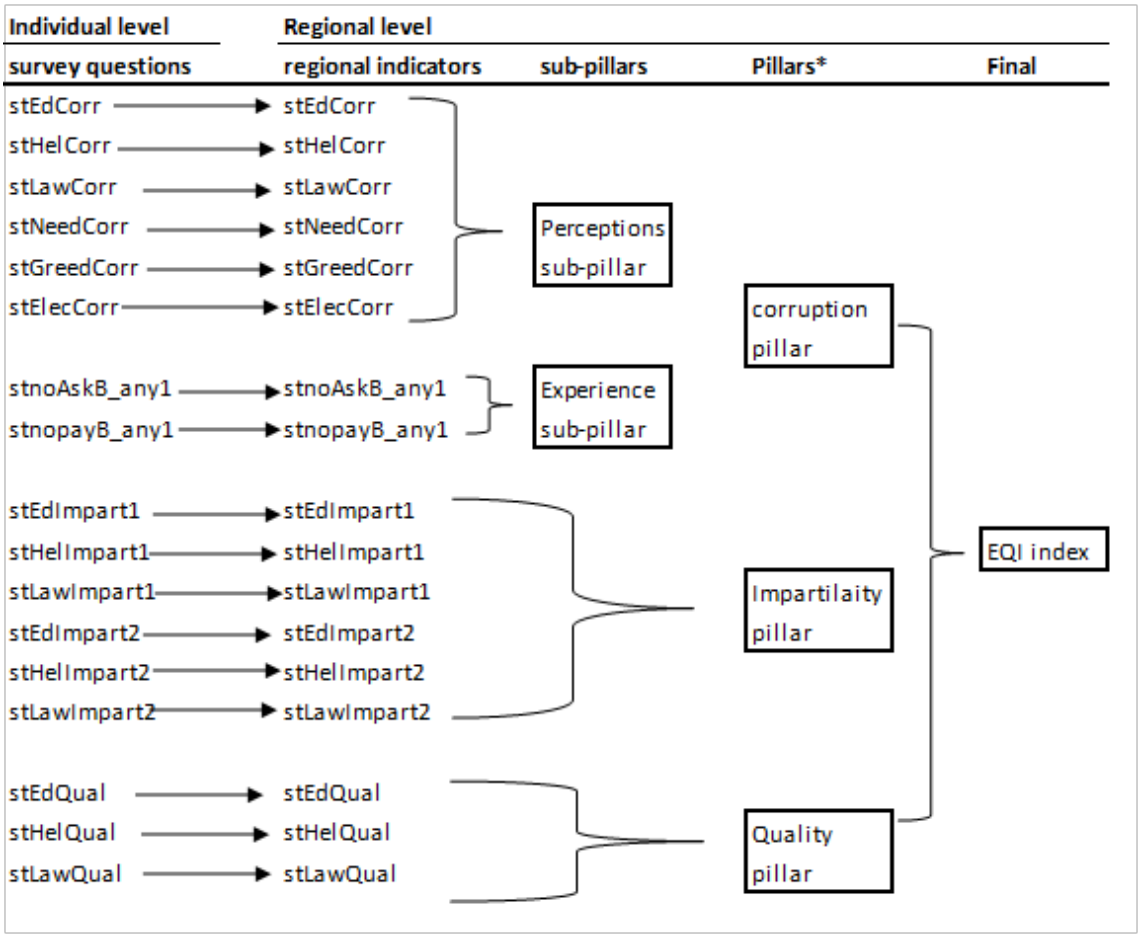
Pillar	Variable description	Name
Corruption		
i. perceptions		
	corruption in education	stEdCorr
	corruption in health care	stHelCorr
	corruption in law enforcement	stLawCorr
	need corruption	stNeedCorr
	greed corruption	stGreedCorr
	elections are fair and clean	stElecCorr
ii. experiences		
	asked to pay a bribe for public service	stnoAskBany1
	paid a bribe for public service	stnopayBany1
Impartiality		
	some get special advantages in education	stEdImpart1
	some get special advantages in health care	stHelImpart1
	some get special advantages in law enforcement	stLawImpart1
	all treated equally in education	stEdImpart2
	all treated equally in health care	stHelImpart2
	all treated equally in law enforcement	stLawImpart2
Quality		
	quality of education	stEdQual
	quality of health care	stHelQual
	quality of law enforcement	stLawQual

In the first two rounds, we then took the standardised sample mean for combined WGI data and set each country's national average as such. A key difference made in the 2017 round (and retrospectively in all subsequent rounds) was that we aggregated to the WGI at the pillar levels of corruption, impartiality and quality in order to better make use of these three distinct concepts empirically. This also allows for the added advantage of a more valid comparison of unit changes in each pillar over time. We followed this practice again in the 2021 round.

The regional data itself combines 17 survey questions about QoG in the region, which are shown in Table 4. As noted, the questions are centred on three QoG concepts: 'quality', 'impartiality' and 'corruption'. In building the regional index, we re-score each variable so that higher numbers equate to higher QoG and then the 18 questions/indicators to three pillars based on factor analy-

sis[13]; We then averaged these three pillars together to form the final index figure for each region. After each stage of aggregation, the data was standardised. For the countries without multiple NUTS 2 regions, there is nothing to add to the WGI Country score, thus the WGI data is used as the QoG estimate alone, as regional variation is unobserved. With respect to the countries with regional data, we set the national average as the WGI for each of the three pillars and explained the within country variance using the regional level data. The 'roadmap', so to speak, of the aggregation process can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: **EQI 2021 Roadmap**



*Note: Aggregation from survey questions to regional level includes regional post-stratification weights, based on age, gender and education. * denotes the stage in which the regional estimates are centred on the WGI data.*

To begin, we aggregated the individual scores ('survey question') to the corresponding regional level, so that each of the 17 questions in the index is now a regional 'indicator'. Estimates are

[13]For corruption pillar, the regional estimates are centered round the 'control of corruption WGI score. For impartiality, the estimates are set around the 'government effectiveness' WGI score. The regional impartiality indicators are centered on the 'rule of law' and the regional 'quality' indicators are centered on the 'voice and accountability' and 'government effectiveness' WGI national scores.

aggregated using post-stratification weighting, based on gender, age and education. All population figures by region were taken from the latest Eurostat year (2019). The post-stratification weights have the following property:

$$\sum_{i \epsilon s} \frac{w_i x_i}{\sum_{i \epsilon s} w_i} = \bar{x} \tag{1}$$

Where 's' is the net sample, 'w_i' is the post-stratification weight and 'x_i' is the observation of adjustment variable 'x', e.g. age, gender, or education, of the i-th element in 's'. Finally , $\bar{x}$ the population mean of x. The weights are then divided by their arithmetic mean to have a mean of '1'.

We tested the overall consistency of the 17 indicators with Cronbach's Alpha, which was 0.971, showing high levels of association. In addition, of all the possible pairwise correlations, all are positive when items are re-scaled so that higher scores equal higher QoG. Moreover, significance tests showed that all pairwise correlations are significant ($p<0.01$). Next, factor analysis then grouped the 17 indicators into more similar groupings, of which we find three with an Eigenvalue above '1'. After normalising each of the 17 indicators (through z-score standardisation) so that they share a common range, the 17 indicators were aggregated into the three groupings' 'pillars'. The one exception is the corruption pillar, which had one additional step containing two sub-pillars called 'experience' and 'perceptions', which represent question items reflecting personal experience with petty corruption versus perception of corruption in various other areas. These two sub-pillars were aggregated using equal weighting. The pillars were then aggregated into the regional index[14]. After each step of aggregation, the data was standardised, such that the EU27 mean is '0' with a standard deviation of '1'.

A region's score relative to its country mean is calculated via weighting each region's score by their share of the national population. This figure is thus used to explain regional variation only within each country included (e.g. not absolute levels of QoG). We then subtract this mean score from each region's individual pillar score from the regional study, which shows if the region is above or below its national average and by how much. This figure is then added to the national level, WGI data, so each region has an adjusted score for each of the three pillars, centered on the respective WGI indicators. It is worth mentioning that none of the regional variation from the regional index is lost during this merging process; the country mean of all regional scores is simply adjusted. The formula employed is the following:

$$EQIpillar_{xy} = WGI_y + (R.QoG_x - CR.QoG_y) \tag{2}$$

[14]Commission et al. (2008) point out that when combining multiple indicators into a single index, the underlying data should be significantly correlated.

Where 'EQI' is the final score from region 'x' (or country) in each pillar –corruption, impartiality and quality - of the EQI within country 'y' (where applicable). 'WGI' is the World Bank's national average for each country for each pillar, while 'R.QoG' is each region's score from the regional survey and 'CR.QoG' is the country average (weighted by regional population) of all regions within the country from the regional survey for each pillar. The EQI pillars were standardised so that the mean is '0' with a standard deviation of '1'. The three pillar scores were then aggregated using equal weighting.

A full list of the EQI for 2021 for all countries and regions is located on the homepage of the Quality of Government Institute[15]. As per the results for 2010, 2013 and 2017, we found that in several cases the data showed significant and wide variations in QoG within countries (Italy, Belgium, Spain and France for example), while others showed little variation in regional QoG (Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Slovakia).

[15]The regional and microdata for all rounds are freely available for download here: https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data/data-downloads/european-quality-of-government-index

5 Margins of Error for the 2021 EQI

As reported in the three previous rounds, we constructed margins of error for the regional estimates, similar to the authors of the WGI report 'margins of error', around each of the QoG variables that are published annually. The idea is to construct a range around the regional estimates so that we can say with some degree of certainty that region 'x's higher QoG score is in fact 'significantly' higher than region 'y's score. Although, in theory, any number can be chosen, we selected a margin of error at the 95% confidence level. After obtaining the margin of error based on our sample size, we then can calculated the distance around the estimates of QoG for each region.

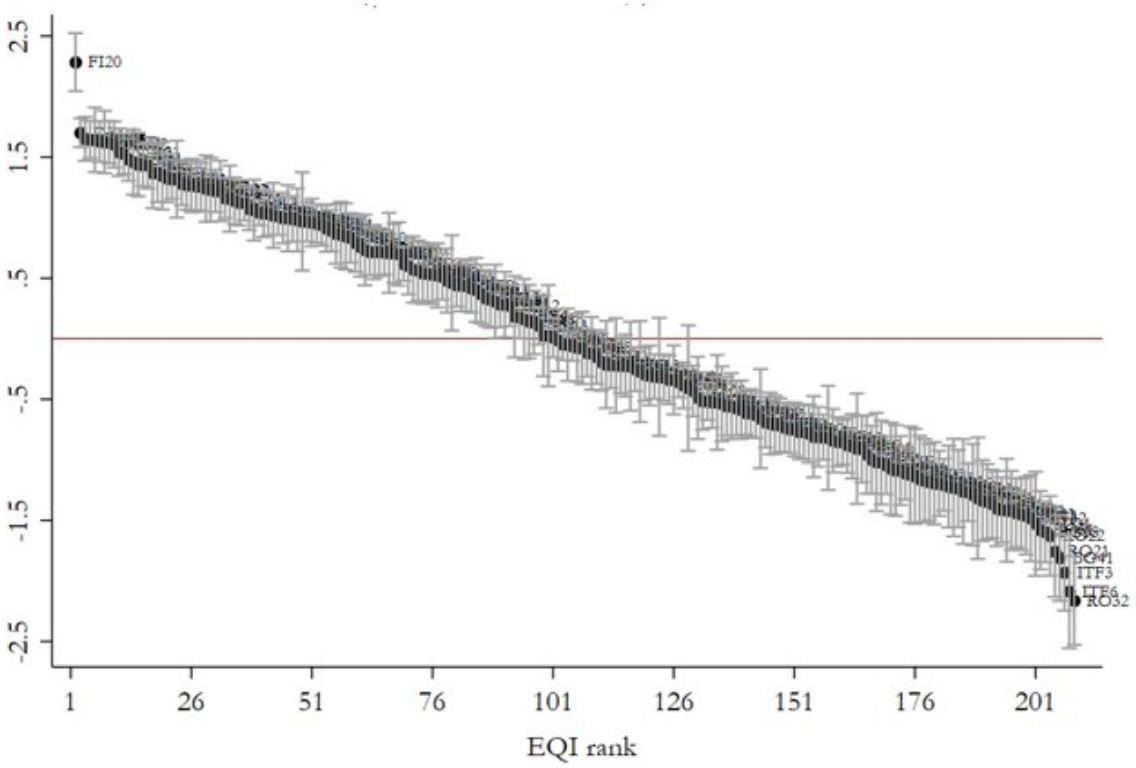
To be precise, there are two ways to go about calculating the margin of error for survey data – an 'exact' confidence interval and an 'approximate' confidence interval. The former takes into account both sampling and non-sampling errors, while the latter only considers random sampling errors. While the 'exact' interval may be more precise, we find the advantages of the 'approximate' confi- dence interval to far outweigh the drawbacks, in particular with respect to the efficiency and time saved in the calculation. Moreover, we have no reason to suspect that there is any bias in certain groups being excluded or not being forthright in their responses, so compensating for such error is simply beyond our reach. Thus, we report an 'approximate' confidence interval for each region's EQI estimate.

We began by assuming a normal distribution of the sample so that we may use the Central Limit Theorem. We know from basic statistical probability that in a sample 'x', 95% of the area of a basic normal Bell curve is between our estimates (μ) 1.96+/- the standard error around μ. We calculate the standard error as: S.E. = $\sigma/\sqrt{n}$. The margin of error for each individual region is based around the QoG estimate: 1.96 +/- $\sigma/\sqrt{n}$, where n=17 for the 17 regional indicators used to construct the EQI.

Figure 3 shows the results of the calculations. We can see that each region has its own individual margin of error based on the consistency of the estimates for each of the 17 aggregated questions in the survey. Regions in which aggregate responses to the QoG questions are inconsistent (e.g. citizens feel that that the services are impartial, but lack good quality) will have higher margins of error than those regions in which citizens rated the quality, impartiality and corruption at a consistently high (or moderate or low) level.

The mean margin of error by region is 0.295 with a standard deviation of 0.081. The three regions with the greatest level of consistency are Steiermark (AT22), Midtjylland (DK04) and Friuli-Venezia Giulia (ITH4), with 0.11, 0.12 and 0.12 respectively. The three regions with the greatest uncertainty around their estimates are the Budapest and Pest (HU11 and HU12) and Calabria

Figure 3: **EQI in Rank order with Regional Margins of Error**



Note: Estimates shown with 95% margins of error. Horizontal '0' line represents the EU27 mean.

(IT06) regions with 0.46, 0.47 and 0.50 respectively. Figure 3 shows the full range of countries and regions, with confidence intervals around the estimates of the 2020 EQI. The highest ranked region is the small, Swedish speaking, Finish island region of Åland (FI20), which shows as a positive outlier for the third straight EQI round; while the region of Bucharest (RO32) is ranked lowest.

6 Testing the Uncertainty of the 2021 Estimates

In this section, we summarise a number of alternative simulations that were done in order to test how sensitive the results are to our model assumptions and specifications. Specifically, we examined the effects of alternative weighting schemes, aggregation methods, and the standardisation and exclusion of individual indicators in the index, to test how closely the results resemble those finally reported.

In the 2021 version of the EQI, we continue the practice from 2017 (which was also retrospectively applied to previous years). The method is now to centre the regional indicators around national estimates for each of the three pillars – corruption, impartiality and quality – and thus, in order to elucidate the results as clear as possible, we undertook sensitivity analyses for each of the three pillars. In sum, the following adjustments were considered – testing the sensitivity with all possible combinations:

Table 5: Alternative Construction Scenarios to Test Uncertainty

Model	**Weighting**	**Aggregation**	**Excl. item**	**Standardisation**	**Micro to macro**
original EQI	equal	arithmetic	none	z-score	standard
					demographic weighting
alternatives	factor	geometric	one at a time	min-max	none
					only online
					only CATI

6.1 Corruption Pillar

Table 6 shows the top 10 most divergent scenarios from the 2021 EQI, un-centred corruption pillar estimates. The table shows the various ways in which the original EQI roadmap has been altered, along with the median shift in regional rank and the region with the greatest shift in rank due to the alteration, as well as the direction of that shift. We used the Spearman Rank coefficient as a metric to test the overall divergence from the original EQI. In general, we observed that the corruption pillar is quite stable and robust to alterations. However, there is some evidence that the online sample produced some divergent results, as the Spearman rank coefficient is 0.844 with the final corruption sample. The CATI-alone sample also has a lower Spearman Rank. This could

be due to survey administration differences and their effect on issues such as social desirability bias in answering sensitive questions about corruption, or the difference could be due to the fact that when aggregating with the CATI or online samples alone, the observations per region were reduced by 50%, which leads to more volatile estimates. In terms of individual regions, we noticed that regions such as EL61 in Greece were reported as highly favourable among online respondents, as their relative rank in the raw corruption scores increased by 134, while NL32 (Noord-Holland) decreased by 96 spots when using only CATI respondents, as compared with the original (raw, un-centred) rank order.

When looking at the other types of alterations – weighting, excluded indicators, aggregation and standardisation, we can see that these alterations do not lead to significant differences in the overall ranking, as the Spearman coefficient does not drop below 0.95 for any of them. Yet, among these, we observe that alterations that include factor weighting increase the uncertainty of the estimates. The median shift in rank ranges between 11 and 12 for the 5 most deviant scenarios in Table 5, which is relatively small given that there are 208 regions in the sample and these rankings are un-centred by country.

Table 6: Top 5 Most Divergent Scenarios: Corruption Pillar

Aggregation	Weights	Excl. item	Micro adj.	Standard.	Med. (max)	Max reg.	Spearman
arithmetic	none	none	online only	z-score	12(134)	EL61	0.844
arithmetic	none	none	CATI only	z-score	12(96)	NL32	0.928
arithmetic	Factor	Greed$_c orr$	none	z-score	11.5(49)	NL32	0.953
arithmetic	Factor	Bribe$_p ay$	none	z-score	11 (48)	ITF6	0.956
arithmetic	Factor	Need$_c orr$	none	z-score	11.5(56)	NL11	0.957

Note: total of 208 regions, with 1st scenario representing the final index. These are the 5 scenarios LEAST like the aggregated regional Corruption index used to build the EQI. Median shift is absolute median shift. A total of 39 simulations were run.

There are a few outlying regions that are highly affected by alterations to the EQI index assumptions however. Namely, the Greek regions of EL54 and EL61 ares highly sensitive to several of the alterations, particularly the type of survey administration, moving at times over 100 places in the rankings. Other regions that make substantial shifts in ranks (between 48 and 96 places) in certain alternative simulations are Noord-Holland (NL32), Calabria (ITF6), Groningen (NL11), and Zeeland (NL34).

6.2 Impartiality Pillar

Table 7: Top 5 Most Divergent Scenarios: Impartiality Pillar

Aggregation	Weights	Excl. item	Micro adj.	Standard.	Med. (max)	Max reg.	Spearman
arithmetic	none	none	online only	z-score	17(114)	BE3	0.76
arithmetic	none	none	CATI only	z-score	11(58)	ES62	0.945
arithmetic	noe	none	unweighted	z-score	5 (51)	AT33	0.985
arithmetic	Factor	ed$_i$*mpart*1	none	z-score	4 (25)	HU11	0.993
geometric	Factor	ed$_i$*mpart*1	none	min-max	4 (26)	HU11	0.993

Note: total of 208 regions, with 1st scenario representing the final index. These are the 5 scenarios LEAST like the aggregated regional Corruption index used to build the EQI. Median shift is absolute median shift. A total of 34 simulations were run.

In the case of impartiality, we can observe that the divergence from the main (raw, un-centred) corruption ranks are most deviant when aggregating only the online sample from the micro-level to the regional level, with a Spearman rank of 0.76. Again, we can also observe that the CATI-alone aggregated estimates are the second most deviant, yet the Spearman rank is considerably higher, at 0.945. The median shifts for these two most divergent scenarios are 17 and 11, respectively. However, we can see that all other types of adjustments led to very little divergence from the original raw rankings. When aggregating without post-stratification demographic weights, the Spearman is 0.985, and setting aside the first impartiality question on education, using factor weighting and either arithmetic or geometric aggregation are the fourth and fifth most divergent scenarios. However, the Spearman rank is above 0.99 in both cases and the median shift is just 4 ranks.

In terms of the individual regions most affected by the various decisions made to build the impartiality index, Wallonie (BE3) is most sensitive to survey administration (online only), followed by Murcia (ES62) in Spain (CATI only). The Austrian province of Tyrol (AT33) is the most affected when using unweighted micro data, while in scenarios 4 and 5 in Table 6 the capital region of Budapest (HU11) drops 25 and 26 places, respectively.

6.3 Quality Pillar

Table 8: Top 5 Most Divergent Scenarios: Quality Pillar

Aggregation	Weights	Excl. item	Micro adj.	Standard.	Med. (max)	Max reg.	Spearman
arithmetic	none	none	online only	z-score	15(121)	EL61	0.830
geometric	none	ed$_q$*ual*	none	min-max	14 (99)	IE05	0.908
geometric	factor	ed$_q$*ual*	none	min-max	14(100)	IE05	0.909
arithmetic	none	none	CATI only	z-score	12 (61)	RO11	0.944
arithmetic	none	none	none	min-max	9 (59)	ES42	0.960

Note: total of 208 regions, with 1st scenario representing the final index. These are the 5 scenarios LEAST like the aggregated regional Corruption index used to build the EQI. Median shift is absolute median shift. A total of 22 simulations were run.

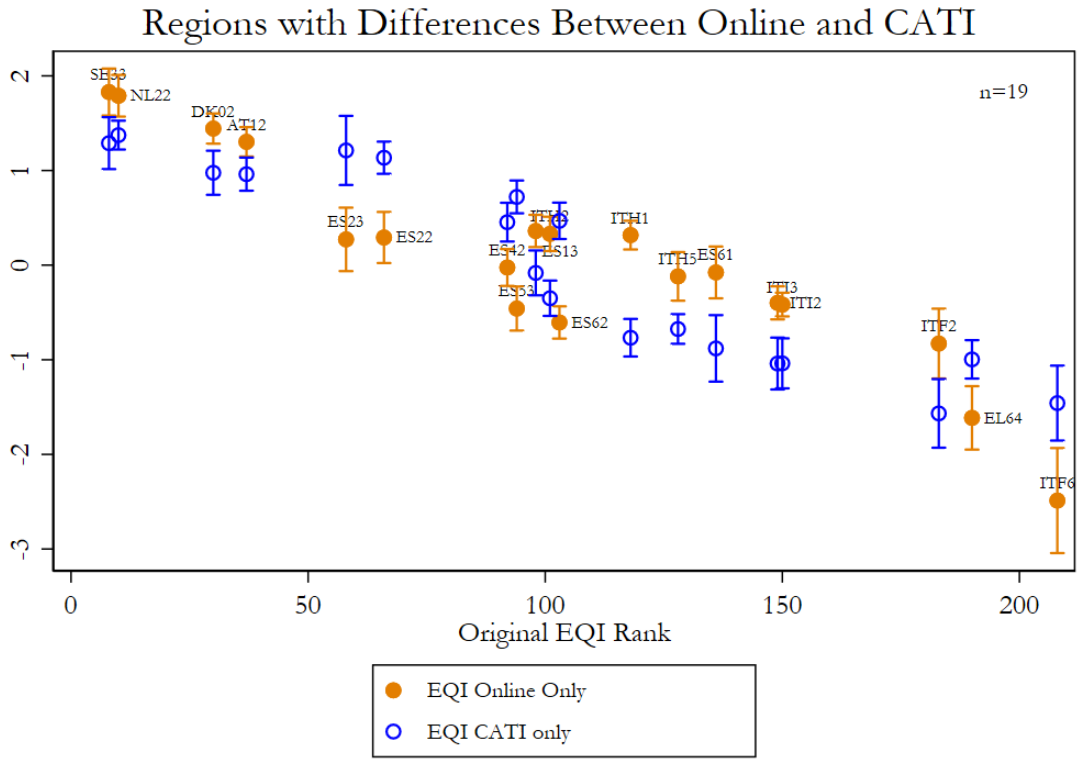
In the case of the quality pillar items, we can again observe that the most deviant case is when we aggregate the online respondents only from the microdata. The Spearman Rank in this case is 0.83, with a median shift of 15. Next, we can see that geometric aggregation together with min-max standardisation and excluding the item on education quality leads to the next two most deviant scenarios, with Spearman ranks of 0.908 and 0.909, respectively. Both have median shifts of 14 places in the un-centred regional rankings. The CATI only aggregated data is the fourth most deviant case, with a Spearman rank of 0.944, while the unweighted microdata ranks fifth, with a Spearman rank of 0.96.

With respect to the individual regions most affected by the adjustments in the quality data, we found again that the Greek region of EL61 is the most sensitive to the online only aggregation sample, while the Irish region of IE05 (Southern) is the most sensitive to the exclusion of the education item. The Romanian region of Nord Vest (RO11) moves 61 places from its original rank when aggregating with only CATI respondents, while Castile-La Mancha (ES42) moves 59 places when aggregating microdata without weighting.

Overall, the uncertainty tests tell a fairly clear story. First, the EQI rankings are most sensitive to changes made during the micro-level aggregation, not to decisions made after the regional data has been aggregated. Second, the online-only estimates are most deviant from the original, un-centred rankings for each pillar. We therefore re-built the final EQI index using samples of the exclusive CATI and online groups and compared the two to elucidate, after post-country centring, which regions are most sensitive to survey administration and in what direction. We calculated margins of error for each estimate and tested whether CATI and online EQI estimates differ sig-

nificantly.

Figure 4: **Significant Differences in Online versus CATI Aggregation**



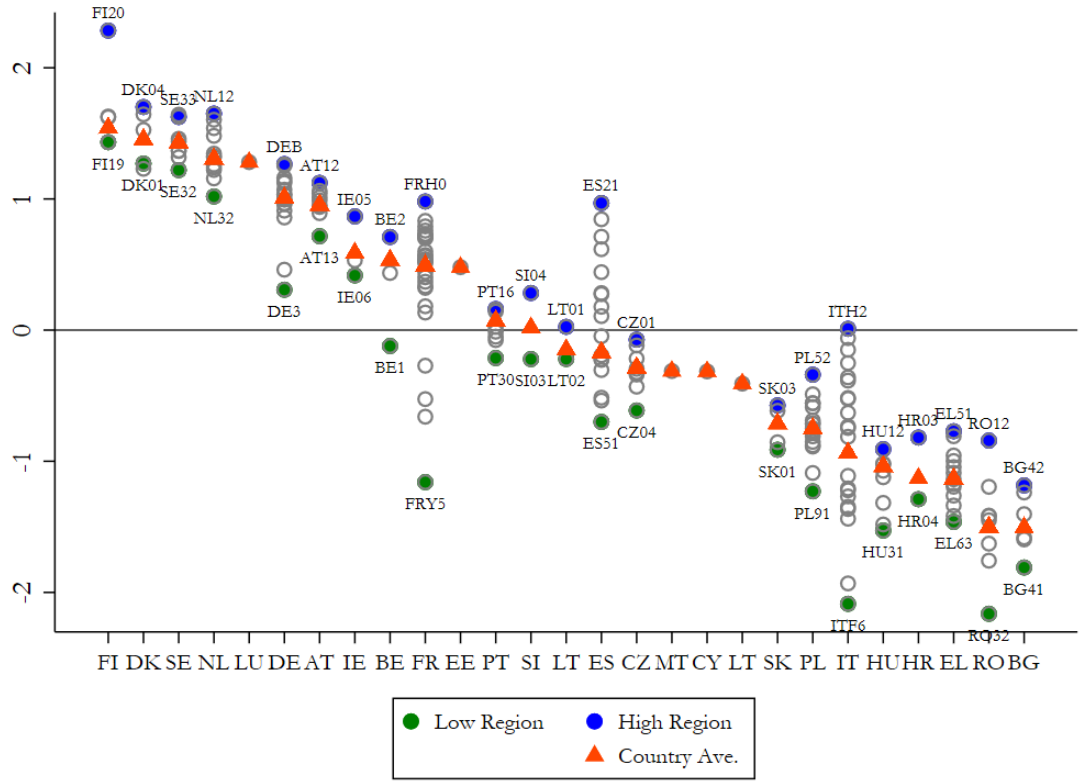
Note: estimates produced using separate samples and margins of error calculated via method shown in section 5. non-significant differences are not shown. Y-axis is overall EQI score, and x-axis is the region's rank on the original EQI index.

We found that in 91% of the regions there is no significant difference between the online and CATI estimates for the full index. Yet in 9% of the regions (19) we found that the margins of error do not overlap, and they are shown above in Figure 4. For regions in which the orange full circle is above the hollow blue circle, such as ITH1 (Bolzano), these are 'favoured' by the online sample, while the regions in which the blue hollow circle is above the orange circle are 'favoured' by the CATI respondents.

7 Final Index: Regional Variation of EQI and External Validity Checks

In the interest of space, all EQI, pillar and margin of error estimates are listed in the appendix of this document. Figure 4 summarises the final index; showing the countries in rank order from top to bottom on the y-axis and regional variation on the x-axis. As with the 2013 and 2017 EQI index, the Swedish speaking, Finish island region of Åland is an outlier at the top of the index ranking.

Figure 5: **Countries in Rank Order and Regional Variation of 2021 EQI**

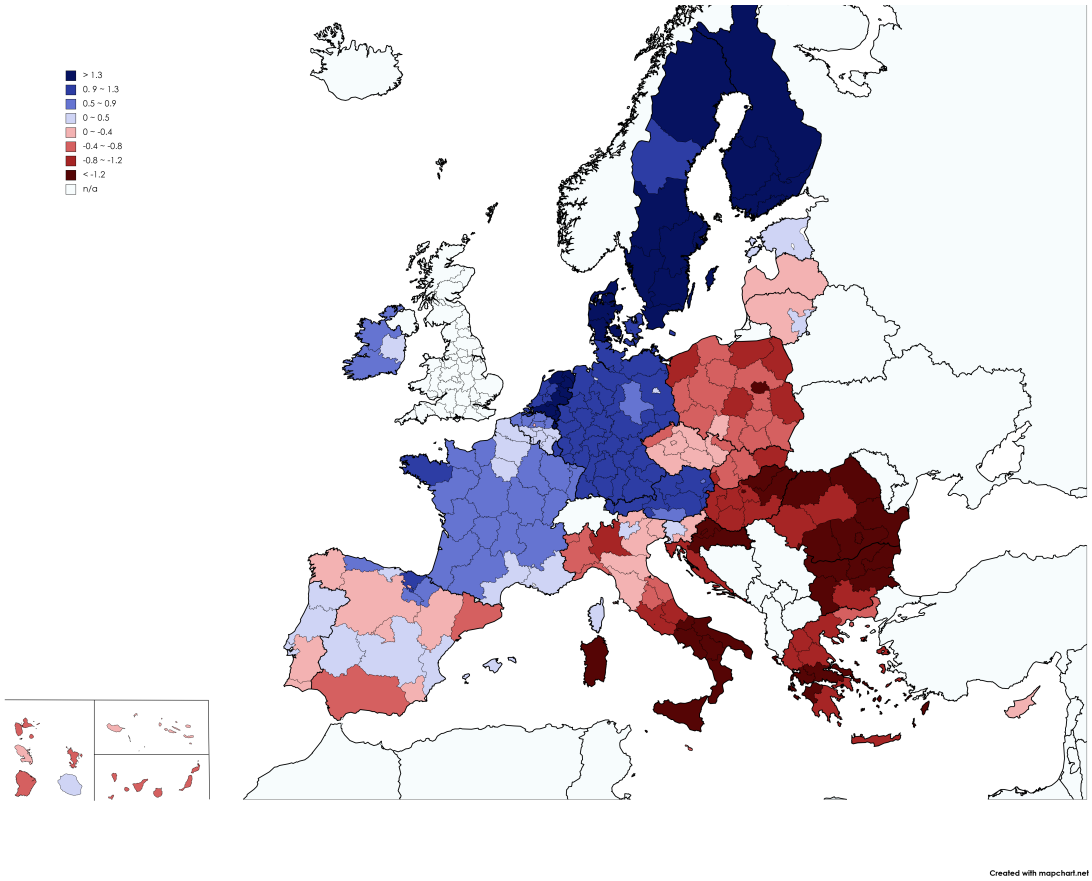


Note: highest regional score in each country with regional data labeled via NUTS code.

The following figures show the results of the EQI index for the four years of data. The previous three years have been re-calculated with the current methodology and a sample of the 2017 EQI for a more direct comparison over time. A major change from previous years is the absence of the UK, which left the EU prior to the 2021 data. As the UK was not included in the current round, we re-calculated past years for the EU27 sample only to make them comparable with 2021.

Based on the two figures above, we can observe several interesting features of the 2021 data. One,

Figure 6: **2021 EQI**



as with previous years, there is significant regional variation in some countries, while there is very little in others. Italy, Spain, France (in particular when considering the overseas regions), Belgium and Romania have quite considerable regional spans in the data. In addition, the range in Poland, Germany and Greece has increased since the previous round. Slovenia is also a noteworthy case, with the eastern region (SI03) being roughly 0.6 standard deviations above the western region of SI04. Moreover, the former is above the EU27 mean (one of only three such new member state regions), while the latter is under it. We also found, for the first time, significant variation between two Irish regions, as the Dublin region (IE06) is significantly lower than the Southern region (IE05) according to the margins of error. In other cases, the within country regional variation is modest or very low, as in Sweden, Denmark, Austria, or Slovakia, where no pairwise differences are significant.

Table 9 shows the pairwise correlations among the current 2020 pillars and main index, along with how they relate to previous years of the EQI. We found that each of the three 2021 pillars is correlated at 0.947 or higher with the main index. As expected, the pillars are also strongly correlated with one another, yet slightly less so, indicating that they do indeed represent distinct concepts. For instance, the weakest correlation is between corruption and quality (0.866), while the strongest is between corruption and impartiality (0.916). We also observed that the 2021 index and its pillars are strongly related to previous years. We adjusted the 2010, 2013 and 2017 versions

to the EU 27 sample, thus increasing the validity of the pairwise comparisons. We can see that 2021 has the highest pairwise correlation with the most recent year (2017), yet still has pairwise correlations over 092 with the years 2010 and 2013, supporting previous years' findings that the data is indeed 'sticky' over time, even despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 9: Pairwise correlations among 2021 EQI pillars and past years

Variable	EQI2021	Corr.2021	Imp. 2021	Qual.2021	EQI2017	EQI2013	
Corrup. 2021	0.962	1					
Impart. 2021	0.965	0.916	1				
Quality 2021	0.947	0.866	0.876	1			
EQI 2017 (adj)	0.952	0.936	0.921	0.898	1		
EQI 2013 (adj)	0.923	0.933	0.881	0.869	0.957	1	
EQI 2010 (adj)	0.931	0.905	0.898	0.892	0.930	0.941	1

Note: Pairwise Pearson correlation statistics reported, n=208. 2010-2017 EQI are adjusted to the EU27 sample for comparability. All coefficients are statistically significant (p<0.001)

In Table 10 below, we expand the simple pairwise correlation analysis to check for external validity of the measure by making two sets of comparisons. First, to establish a type of external validity called 'convergent validation', in which we expect relatively high correlation with alternative measures of the concept (Adcock and Collier, 2001), we compared the 2021 EQI with other possible alternative measures of QoG at the regional level for as many EU NUTS regions as possible. As there are not many to choose from at this time, we limit this to three alternatives - the aggregated corruption perceptions from a recent OECD study in 2016 (OECD, 2016), a measure of corruption risk in procurement (% 'single bidding' by region from 2017, (Fazekas and Kocsis, 2020), and a measure of perceived meritocracy in the public sector from Charron, Dahlström, and Lapuente (2016), which is measured in 2013. Next, to test for so called 'construct validity', we checked the degree of correlation with factors we expect to be correlated with QoG based on *a priori* theory and findings from the literature. In this case, we expected that indicators of socio-economic development, such as the human development index (HDI)[16], per capita wealth, poverty rates and

[16]data on the HDI was collected from https://globaldatalab.org . All other measures of economic development are from Eurostat.

average life expectancy to be significantly correlated with the EQI. We also added an indicator of regional development (or lack there of) in that we show correlations with the % of the population who have never used the internet. Based on numerous findings in the literature, we also anticipate that social trust (from Charron and Rothstein (2018)) and political gender equality (from Sundström and Wängnerud (2016)) are positively related to the EQI. Finally, we included the size of a region in terms of area, which serves as a sort of placebo – we thus did not expect any relationship between regional size and the EQI.

Table 10: Pairwise correlations among Regional QoG Alternatives & Covariates

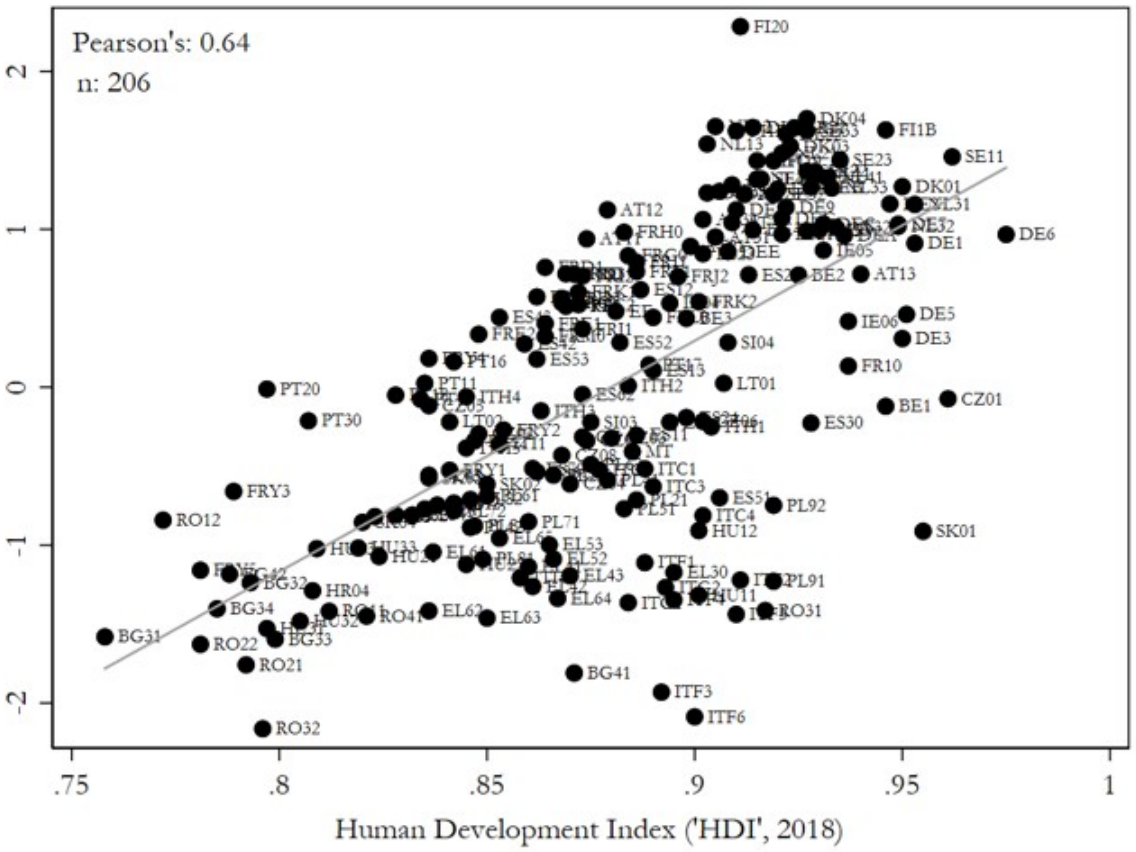
Variable	**EQI2021**	**Qual.2021**	**Imp. 2021**	**Corr.2021**
Alternative measures of QoG				
corruption perceptions (OECD)	0.79	0.70	0.74	0.83
% single bids	-0.53	-0.50	-0.53	-0.51
meritocracy in public sector	0.72	0.69	0.71	0.69
Other Covariates				
HDI (2018)	0.64	0.63	0.6	0.62
PPP per capita (logged, 2018)	0.61	0.61	0.58	0.76
Ave. Life exp. (2018)	0.45	0.55	0.37	0.38
% poverty rate (2018)	-0.63	-0.59	-0.6	-0.55
% Never used internet (2018)	-0.83	-0.74	-0.82	-0.79
% women in local parl. (2015)	0.53	0.51	0.55	0.5
Social trust (2017)	0.55	0.56	0.49	0.55
Area (sq. Km)	0.04	0.002	0.06	0.01

Overall, based on the table above, we found strong evidence of both types of external validity. We can see that perceptions of corruption from an alternative source data (and from over five years earlier) correlate with the EQI at nearly 0.8 and with the corruption pillar at 0.83. Meritocracy in the public sector, which can be considered a narrow form of QoG or a direct cause of it, correlates with the EQI at 0.72 and with our measure of impartiality at 0.71. Single bidding in procurement, which represents a high level of grand corruption/ elite collusion, is also significantly correlated in the expected direction, at -0.53.

Regarding the covariates, we found that both the measure of GDP per capita, as well as the broader HDI measure (see Figure 6) and poverty rates, correlate at 0.61, 0.64 and -0.63, respectively, meaning that QoG and development are strongly related but yet theoretically and empiri-

cally separate. Life expectancy is also significantly correlated (0.45) and in the expected direction, with the quality of services pillar yielding the highest correlation with this measure (0.55). The measure of (lack of) internet use is also highly correlated with regional QoG, at -0.83, meaning areas in the EU27 with the least internet use are also those with the lowest QoG. In addition, we found that the indicators % of women in parliament and social trust both correlate significantly, at roughly 0.5 or greater, with the EQI and all pillars. Lastly, the variable for which we did not anticipate a correlation with the EQI (area) does, indeed, not yield a significant correlation.

Figure 7: **2021 EQI and the HDI**



note: line represents bivariate, least squares regression fit. EQI 2021 shown on Y-axis

8 Overall and Recent Time Trends in the EQI

In this section, we seek to identify if any of our regions have shown a significant trend in a positive or negative direction in the data over time. We test both over the entire time period as well as from the past year (2017). This is useful to identify potentially interesting case studies and to investigate policy ideas from recent success cases. We organised the adjusted EU27 EQI data into a panel dataset for all regions covered with the four years. While it is of course difficult to identify a clear trend from four years in a panel data set per observation, even based on these limited observations we can conduct simple tests that can help us reveal and possible time trends in the data. We began with an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test below to determine whether significant changes have occurred within groups over time. For this, we ran an ANOVA test with an interaction term between the year and a dummy variable for each region (along with the two constituent terms) to determine if any trends within the regions are significant.

Table 11: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Test

Source	**Partial of SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F-stat**	**prob>F**
Model	795.8	417	1.91	26.1	0.000
Year	0.0003	1	0.0003	0.01	0.94
Reg. dummy	55.1	209	0.32	4.4	0.000
Interaction	28.8	207	0.10	1.5	0.002
Residual	9.7	416	0.07		
Total	826.2	833	0.99		

The results in the above table show that there is at least some significant variance within the regions over time during the four years, as the interaction term between the regional dummy variables and time is significant (p=0.002). We then proceeded to time series data regression in order to elucidate which regions in fact have made such significant changes and in which direction the change was made.

The regression model is specified as follows:

$$EQI_{rt} = \delta_r N_r + \theta_t + \beta_r (N_r * \theta_t) + \epsilon_{rt} \quad (3)$$

Where EQI is the index used to capture institutional quality in region (or country) r in the year t (r = 1, 2,.... r, and t = 0, 1, 2, and 3 which equate to 2010, 2013, 2017 and 2021), and where $N_r = 1$ for region 'r' and 0 if otherwise, and ϵ_{rt} the error term. The constant term is omitted[17]. This model can be estimated with simple ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, where δ_r elucidates fixed spatial differences in levels of the EQI and θ_t captures the fixed time effects (e.g. a year count). β_r is the interaction term, which captures temporal trends in the EQI for each region. As regards time trends within regions over time, the null hypothesis states that there are no significant time trends (e.g. β_r is insignificant). Where we observe significant trends (positive or negative) from the baseline year, such regions can be considered to have made a significant change in governance. The interpretation of β_r is thus the average marginal change in the EQI for each region over the three years since the baseline year of 2010.

Table 12: Top 10 Regions with Greatest Average Positive Change in EQI since 2010

Region	**NUTS code**	**Ave. change**	**P-value (2-tailed)**
Severen tsentralen	BG32	0.298	0.002
Vest	RO42	0.284	0.002
Praha	CZ01	0.254	0.005
Severozapaden	BG31	0.250	0.006
Lithuania	LT	0.245	0.007
Gelderland	NL22	0.225	0.011
Bucuresti - Ilfov	RO32	0.213	0.016
Jadranska Hrvatska	HR03	0.181	0.033
Friesland	NL12	0.175	0.037
Puglia	ITF4	0.171	0.044

Table 12 shows the top 10 regions with the greatest average marginal change over the four years of the EQI. All average marginal changes are statistically significant in Table 12 ($p<0.05$). The

[17]Several of our 2021 regions have changed since 2017, and thus we make several adjustments to compare these over time for the purpose of this analysis. First, Ireland's 3 NUTS regions are not comparable with the previous two, NUTS 2 regions, and thus we employ the country level (WGI) estimates to compare Ireland over time here. We do the same for Lithuania, which has recently split into two NUTS 2 regions to unify the comparisons. Hungary and Poland, which have both added a specific capital region. For the time comparisons in this section, we use the older regions (PL12 and HU10) as our units, whereby we take the population weighted average of the two new regions for 2021 to construct the estimates for this year. More on regional changes and EQI variation in Ireland can be found in the appendix, section 10.5

top region in this respect is the Bulgarian region, Severen tsentralen (BG32), which has had an average change of nearly 0.30 standard deviations from the baseline 2010 year[18]. Regions 2-5 are all regions from Eastern and Central Europe, with the capital region of Prague (CZ01) yielding the third greatest average change since 2010. However, not all are newer member regions, as three of the regions at the bottom of this table are from older member states, namely two Dutch regions – Gelderland (NL22), and Friesland (NL12) – which have improved at a rate of roughly 0.23 and 0.18 standard deviations per year, respectively, since 2010.

Table 13: List of Regions with Greatest Positive Change in EQI since 2017

Region	NUTS code	EQI 2017	EQI 2020	Change from '17
Guyane	FRY3	-1.454	-0.66	0.79
Abruzzo	ITF1	-1.85	-1.111	0.74
Umbria	ITI2	-1.407	-0.734	0.67
Yugoiztochen	BG34	-2.064	-1.403	0.66
Comunitat Valenciana	ES52	-0.358	0.283	0.64
Illes Balears	ES53	-0.455	0.178	0.63
Severozapaden	BG31	-2.158	-1.581	0.58
Piemonte	ITC1	-1.091	-0.517	0.57
Marche	ITI3	-1.268	-0.746	0.52
Liguria	ITC3	-1.147	-0.63	0.52
La Rioja	ES23	0.335	0.845	0.51
Zahodna Slovenija	SI04	-0.216	0.283	0.50

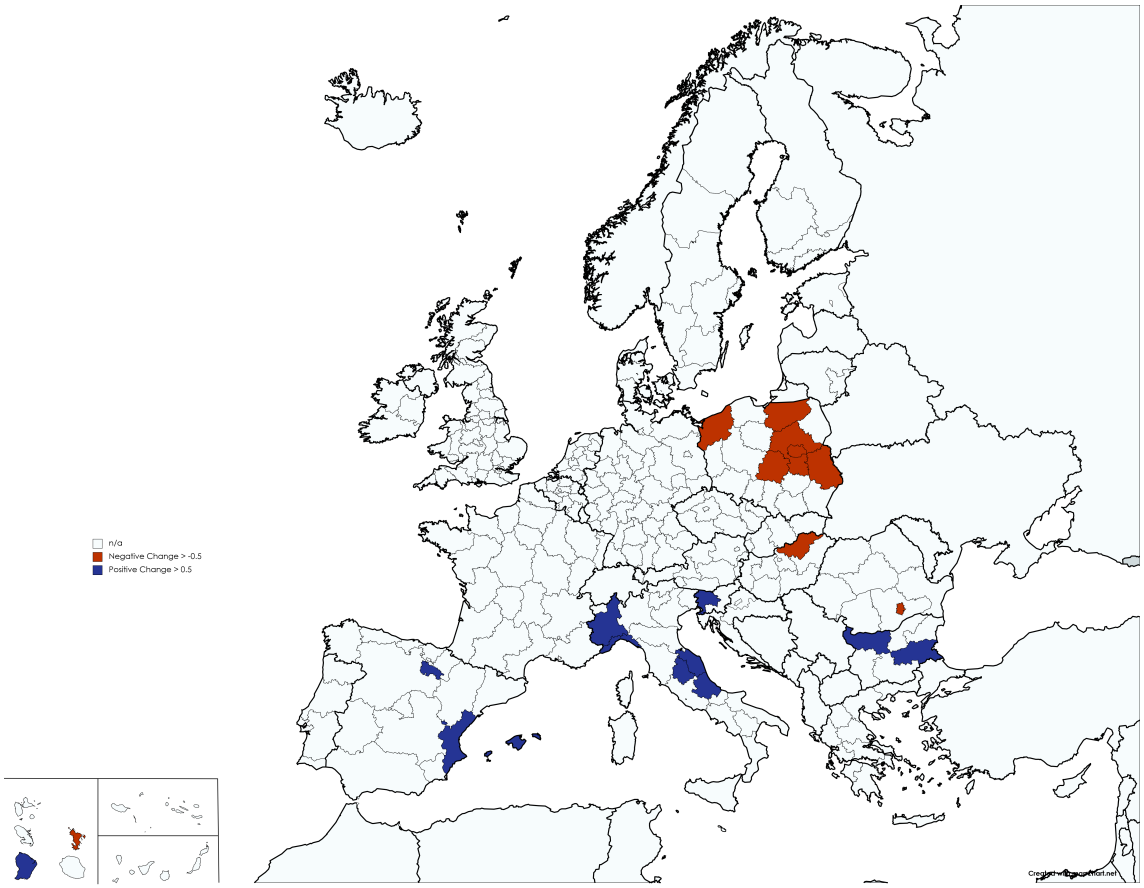
Table 13 shows the regions with the greatest positive changes in the overall EQI since 2017. All regions have a 0.5 standard deviation increase or greater. The top region is the French overseas region of Guyane (from -1.45 to -0.66), followed by the two Italian regions of Abruzzo and Umbria. Two additional Italian regions, Piemonte and Marche also yielded noteworthy positive changes since 2017. We see two Bulgarian regions (BG34 and BG31) that have made significant increases, yet from very low scores of under -2.0 in 2017. Three Spanish regions have also made a significant climb in the data since 2017, Illes Balers and Valencia, which moved from below the overall EQI mean of '0' to above it in 2020, and La Rioja, which climbed to a score of 0.845, ranking it near the top 25% of all EU 27 regions. Finally, the capital region of Slovenia (SI04) made a sizeable climb of roughly 0.5 since the previous EQI round.

Figure 7 illustrates significant positive and negative change in the EQI since 2017. We observe in this figure that the most significant recent over time change has been in southern Europe and East-

[18]The actual change has gone from -2.11 to -1.23 in 2021.

ern/Central Europe, as only one region in Northwest EU countries (Bremen) has made a change of at least 0.5 standard deviations or more. Along with the net positive changers since 2017 we observed in Table 10, the data show five Polish regions dropping significant since 2017, along with Észak-Magyarország (HU31) in Hungary, the German region of Bremen, the overseas French region of Mayotte (FRY5) and the Romanian capital region of București-Ilfov (RO32). The change made by the Bucharest region now renders it the lowest ranked in the 2021 EQI data.

Figure 8: **Significant regional changes since 2017**



Note: Blue (red) indicates significant positive (negative) changes of at least 0.5 standard deviations since 2017.

9 Conclusions: Part I

The 2021 round of the EQI is the largest survey ever undertaken to measure the perceptions of quality of government. It collects the opinions of over 129,000 respondents in a total of 208 NUTS 1 and NUTS 2 regions in all EU 27 member state countries, using both CATI and online survey administration. Since this survey builds on previous rounds of the survey (2010, 2013 and 2017) it also allows for systematic analysis of shifts over time and how both changes and inertia can be explained. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it also seeks to gauge the opinions of Europeans in a particularly dramatic point in time, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. This allows for several new and important insights into the link between institutional performance and quality of government. In particular it allows for important insights into the quality of public services in three of the public service sectors perhaps most closely involved in managing the consequences and responses to the crises; health care, education and law enforcement.

In this report, we highlight some of the most important changes to the data and key results of the EQI 2021 survey. First, we see some improvements in citizens' perceptions of the quality of government between 2017 and 2021. Citizens rate the quality of public service delivery higher and report lower level of bribing and other forms of corruption. Second, we see that citizens in regions with higher quality of government are less worried about the economic and health consequences of the pandemic, and are more likely to perceive that their authorities have handled the crises well. In particular, past levels of corruption perceptions is strongly related to economic worries due to Covid -19 (see Appendix for more on this point). Third, we find that the geography of regional QoG is slowly shifting. While several Eastern European regions seem to be on a rise, several southern European regions see a marked decline. Fourth, we see a remarkable convergence between regions in some countries, while we see a divergence within others. Fifth, looking at just the capital region score compared to their country mean, we also find a stark and noticeable variation in the scores of EU's capital regions, with some capital regions being way below their country mean, while others are significantly higher. Finally, we see noticeable decline in the EQI inn most regions in Poland and Hungary relative to the EU average. Thus, a key lesson from the EQI project overall is the measuring of QoG over time and the importance of tracking such dynamic changes.

The survey also shows the critical link between countries and regions that recently experienced substantial democratic backsliding and perceptions of quality of government. While quality of government is clearly distinct from democratic performance, infringement on media rights and the independence of the judicial system is clearly linked to reduced quality of government.

In the next part of the report (Part II), we further investigate regional variation of QoG within two countries - Spain and Poland (see the Interim Report for more details of case selection). In Spain, we highlight some of the reasons why regions are diverging with respect to QoG, namely the

divergence of Pais Vasco and Catalonia. In our other set of regional cases (Opolskie and Lubelskie), we observe that while both Hungary and Poland experienced a decline in quality of government, it seem important to understand why some regions, such as the Opolskie region in Poland and the Pest region in Hungary seem to have evaded the general drop. A wealth of empirical evidence suggest that while democracies may not always be as effective as theories predict to reduce corruption levels, examples of autocracies that manage to contain corruption are very rare. In most international comparisons, liberal democracies fare the best in terms of containing corruption and improving the quality of government (Bauhr and Grimes, 2021).

10 Appendix

10.1 : The effect of Covid-19 perceptions on attitudes to QoG from the 2020 EQI Pilot

As noted, the original survey was scheduled to go into the field in March/April of 2020. Yet due to the many uncertainties created by the Covd-19 pandemic, we decided to delay going into thee field *en masse*, and to instead assess the impact of Covid-19 on the overall response of the EQI core questions. Instead, we invested a small portion of the budget to conduct a pilot survey in three selected countries - Germany, Italy and Romania. The sample consists of 1000 respondents (500 via CATI and 500 online) in each country, for a total of just over 3000. We present and summarize our findings here in appendix section. Our main inquiry here is whether the pandemic has a noticeable effect on responses. While we cannot prove causality, we do test for several empirical implications. First, we look at the overall correlations between our three questions regarding Covid19 attitudes and each individual EQI core question, controlling for a host of demographic factors, survey administration and country fixed effects. Next, we compare mean scores across all EQI core questions for each country with previous years to test whether there are significant differences between the two years and if so, to what magnitude (in terms of standard deviation changes). Third, we compare previous changes in the 2013 to 2017 round of the EQI data prior to Covid19 for Germany, Italy and Romania to provide a context through which we can assess the magnitude of any current changes.

10.2 The relationship between Covid-19 and EQI core questions

To gauge citizen attitudes of Covid-19, we inquired about three issues in the questions below:

1. How would you rate how the authorities are handling the Coronavirus in your area? (1=very good, 2=somewhat good, 3=somewhat bad, 4= very bad, 99=DK/refuse)

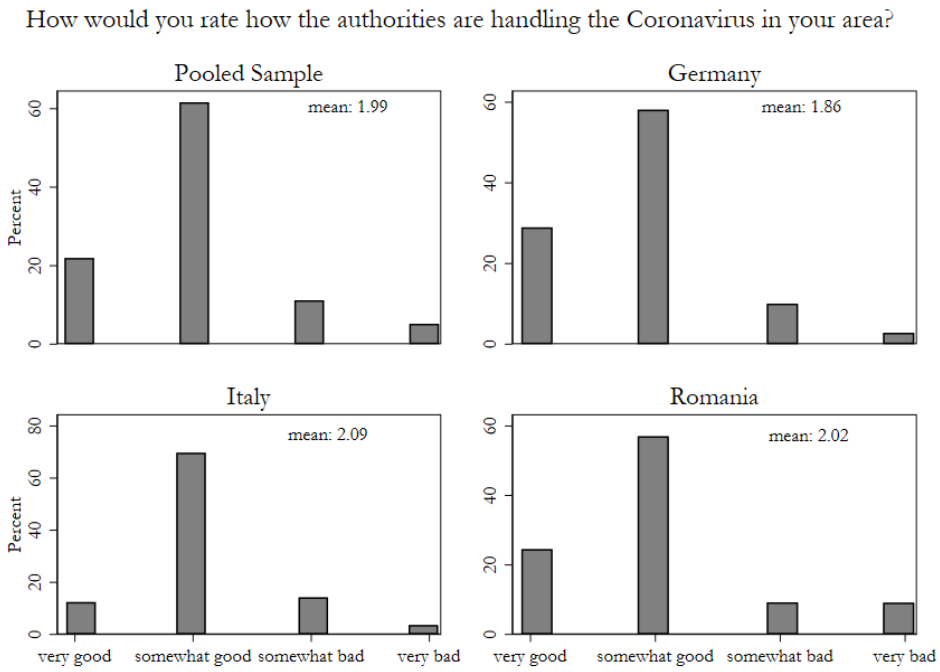
2. Personally, how worried are you about the effect of the Coronavirus/COVID19 on the following?: (1=very worried, 2=somewhat worried, 3=not so worried, 4=not at all worried)

- your own or your family's health?
- your own or your family's economy?

The first question asks about one's perception of the institutional response to Covid-19, while the other two questions inquire about citizens' personal worries. We begin in Figure 1 with the general

satisfaction of citizens regarding the authorities' handling of Covid-19 where they live. The data reveal that Germans show on average the highest level of satisfaction (1.86) and the mean difference between Germans and the other two countries is statistically significant ($p<0.05$, two-tailed t-test). Yet the means between Romania and Italy are statistically indistinguishable ($p=0.09$). However, overall, respondents in all three countries show striking high level of satisfaction.

Figure 1: **Summary of Satisfaction with Handling of Covid19**



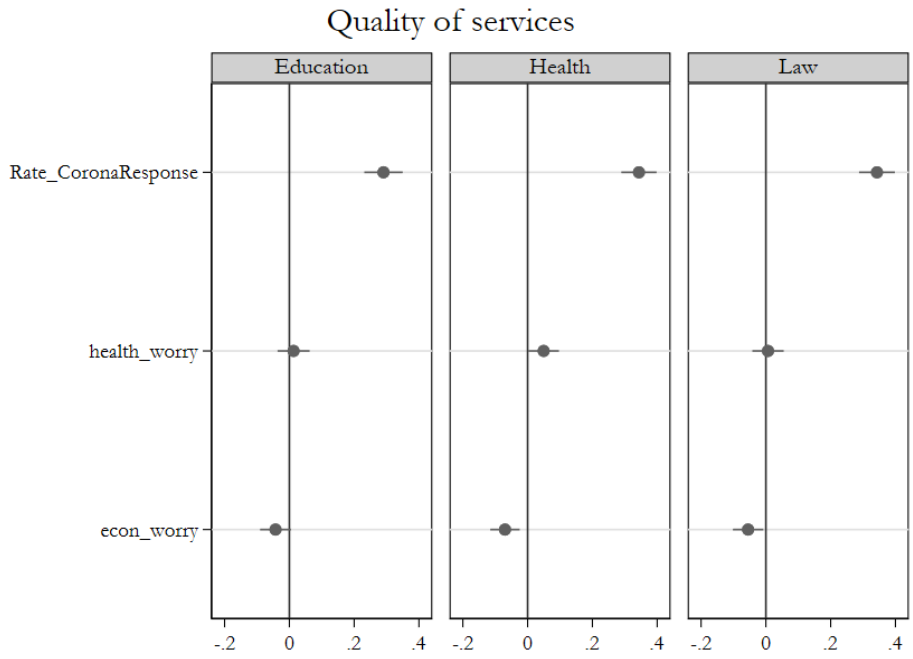
Note: question ranked from 1-4, with lower scores equally higher perceived quality of handling Covid19.

Next, we examine the relationship between individual level responses on the three questions above with responses on the EQI core questions. The figures below show the marginal effects from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression of a one-unit increase of each of these three questions on levels of each of the EQI questions, controlling for age, gender, income, education, occupation, population of residence, type of survey administration and country of residence, along with survey weights. In the analyses below, we reverse the scale of the satisfaction question (1) to indicate that higher scores equal more satisfaction, while increase in the other two questions indicate more personal worry about the virus. All EQI questions below have been re-scaled so that higher values equal higher 'quality of government' ('QoG', e.g. higher quality, greater impartiality and lower corruption). In addition, all questions are standardized (z-score) so that we observe a standard deviation change in the question as a results of a one unit increase of the Covid-19 questions.

The results are quite consistent across all EQI core questions, highlighted in Figures 2-8. We find very unsurprisingly that positive perceptions of Covid-19 handling equate with better percep-

tions of QoG across the board. The effect is significant in all models and the magnitude of the effect is between 0.18 and 0.35 standard deviations of the EQI core items, depending on the question. Conversely, we find that personal worry about one's own or family's health due to Covid-19 has no significant association with any of the EQI perceptions questions of quality, impartiality or corruption. The question regarding economic worry does have some statistically significant association with 11 of the 14 EQI questions, yet the magnitude is often quite small (<0.10 standard deviations).

Figure 2: **Covid-19 Attitudes and Perceptions of Service Quality**



Note: estimates (dots) show the effect of a one unit increase in the Covid-19 variables on each EQI questions, which are measured in terms of (z-score) standard deviations. Dots to the right side of the zero line have a positive effect, while dots on the left side show a negative effect. 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3: **Covid-19 Attitudes and Perceptions of Service Impartiality:Education**

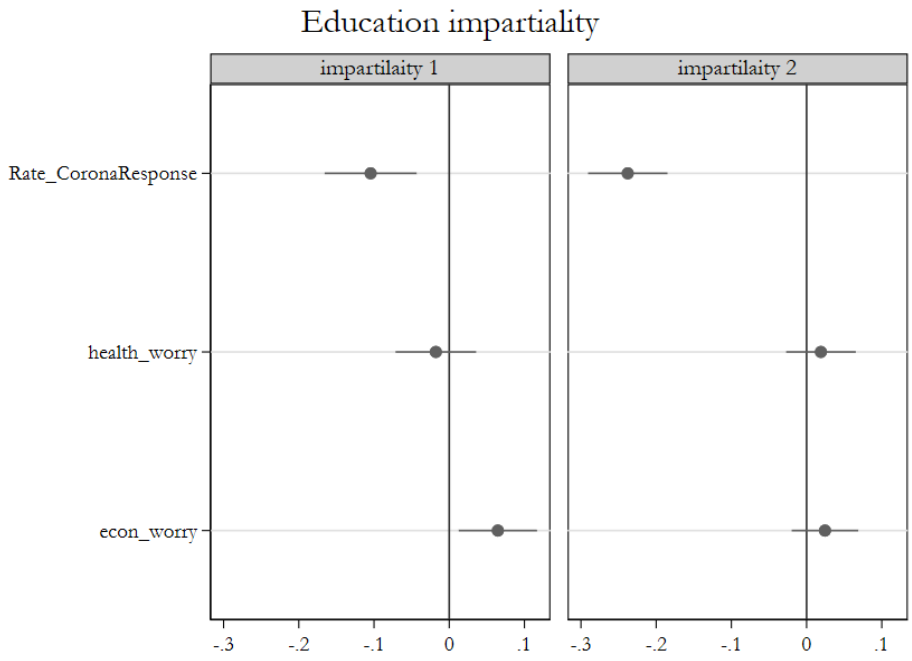


Figure 4: **Covid-19 Attitudes and Perceptions of Service Impartiality: Health**

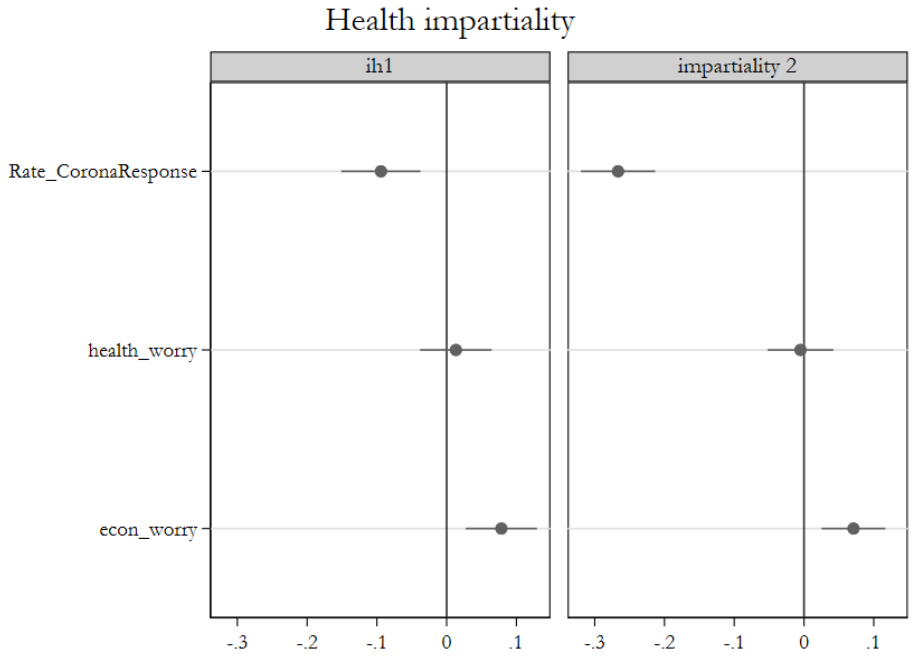


Figure 5: **Covid-19 Attitudes and Perceptions of Service Impartiality: Law Enforcement**

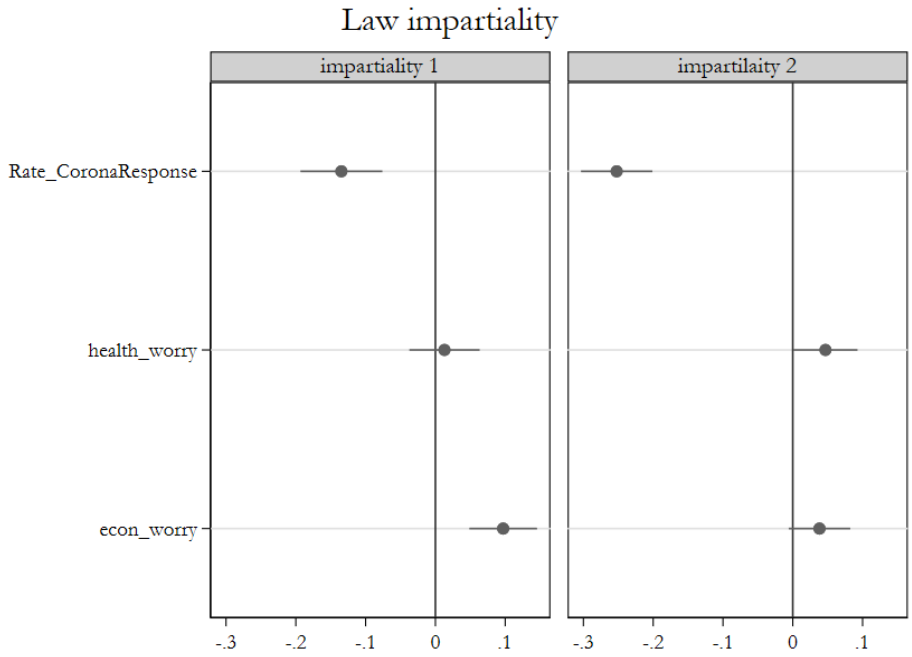


Figure 6: **Covid-19 Attitudes and Perceptions of Corruption**

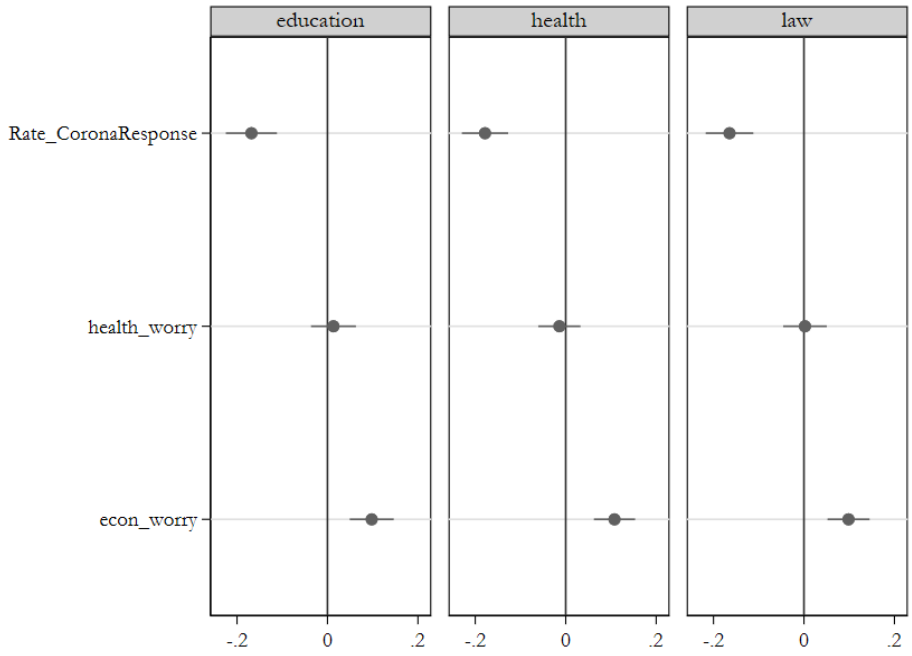
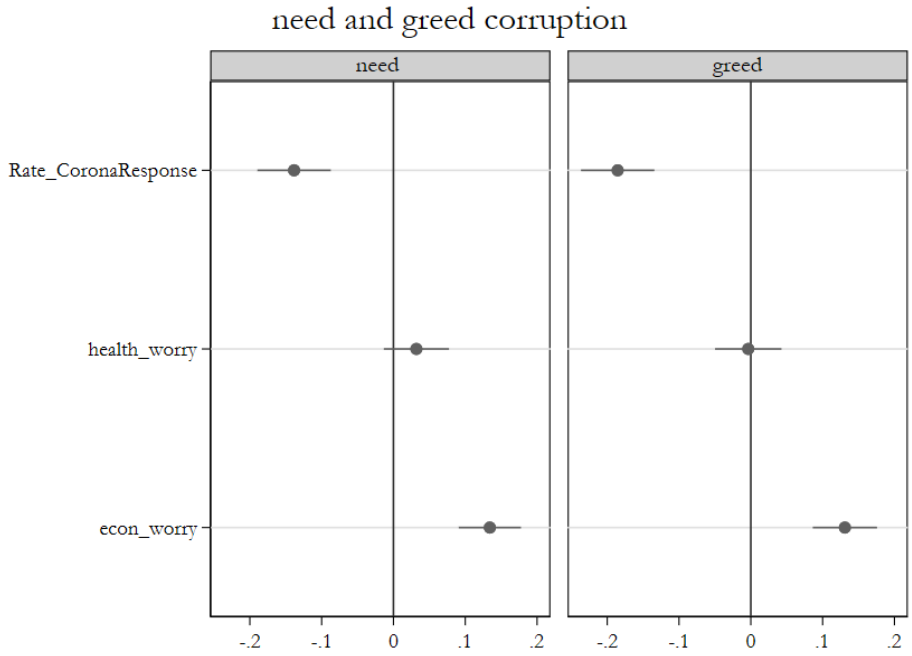
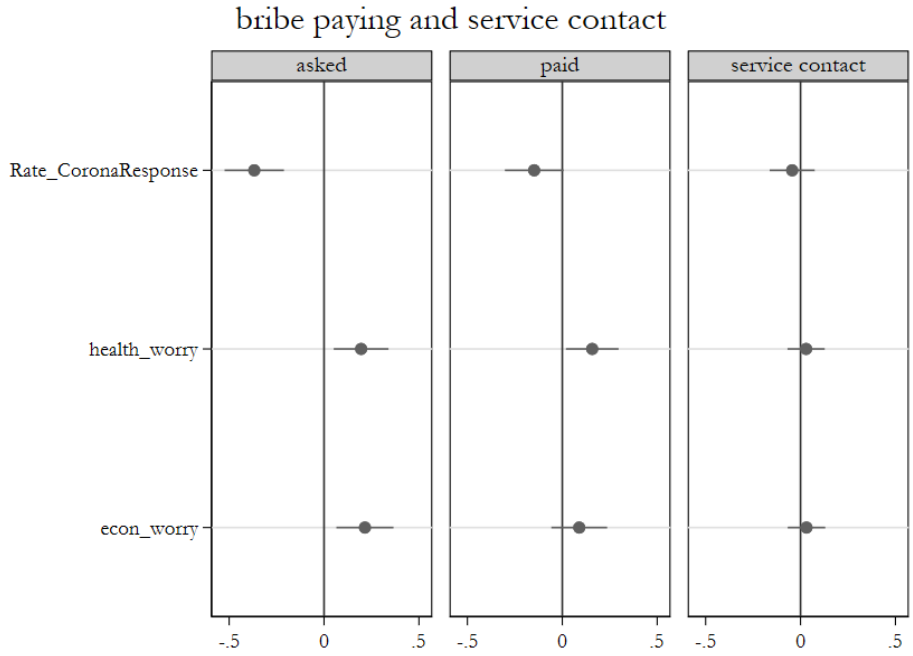


Figure 7: **Covid-19 Attitudes and Perceptions of Corruption**



Having looked at the questions on perceptions of services, we now turn to personal experiences, using logistic regression (as all outcomes are now binary). We find that having contact with any of our public services in question does not associate with any attitudes on Covid-19. However, we do observe that the questions have a small, but significant effect on some aspects of petty corruption experiences. First, people who rate the Covid-19 response by authorities more positively tend to report few experiences with either being asked or having paid a bribe for any service in question, which is in line with our expectations. Second, the more worried a respondent is about their own or their family's health, the more likely they are to report instances of being asked and having paid a bribe. This could be due to services being limited during the pandemic, which offers more opportunities for rent seekers combined with people's willingness to pay an extra sum for a service when they feel rather desperate. Economic worry is also associated with being asked to pay, yet not having paid, all things being equal.

Figure 8: **Covid-19 Attitudes and Experiences with Corruption**



Note: change in logged odds shows, with 95% confidence intervals from logistic regression, controlling for age, gender, income, education, occupation, population of residence, type of survey administration and country of residence, along with survey weights.

10.3 Comparing changes in mean responses to QoG questions over time.

We now move to examine whether there are any changes in the core EQI questions from the previous round (2017), and if so which direction. Additionally, we examine the magnitude of the change and the level of significance (based on two-sample t-tests). As there are clear country-level contextual differences in the responses, we take each country one at a time, comparing the levels using the 10-point scale respondents in 2020 with the similar scales in 2017 and 2013. As our pilot sample consists of just 1000 respondents per country, we do not have the sample size in 2020 to dis-aggregate to the regional level, but the country effects are elucidating nonetheless.

Table A1: Comparing Germany's scores over past 3 EQI rounds on Core Questions

Indicator	2020	95% c.i.	2017	95% c.i.	diff.	s.d. diff.	2013-17	s.d. diff
qualEd10	6.97	6.73,7.22	6.26	6.21,6.3	0.72*	0.38	-0.07	-0.04
qualHel10	7.29	7.03,7.55	6.58	6.53,6.62	0.71*	0.37	-0.06	-0.03
qualLaw10	7.28	7.02,7.54	6.75	6.7,6.79	0.53*	0.27	0.3	0.15
impEd10	5.88	5.5,6.25	6.37	6.31,6.44	-0.50*	-0.18	-0.69	-0.25
impHel10	5.55	5.16,5.94	5.72	5.65,5.78	-0.17	-0.06	-0.62	-0.22

impLaw10	6.8	6.41,7.18	7.2	7.13,7.26	-0.4	-0.15	-0.49	-0.19
impEd2	3.08	2.96,3.21	2.81	2.78,2.83	0.28*	0.27	0.05	0.04
impHel2	2.83	2.7,2.97	2.55	2.52,2.57	0.28*	0.27	0.11	0.1
impLaw2	3.16	3.04,3.28	3.02	3.0,3.05	0.14	0.14	0.07	0.07
corrEd10	7.41	7.02,7.79	8.02	7.97,8.08	-0.62*	-0.26	-0.05	-0.02
corrHel10	7.02	6.63,7.4	7.24	7.18,7.3	-0.22	-0.09	-0.03	-0.01
corrLaw10	7.38	6.99,7.76	7.9	7.84,7.95	-0.52*	-0.22	-0.12	-0.05
need10	8.09	7.73,8.46	8.42	8.37,8.48	-0.33	-0.14		
greed10	7.44	7.03,7.84	7.49	7.43,7.56	-0.06	-0.02		

*Note: weighted means reported. Number of observations for 2020 and 2017 is 240 and 6,799 respectively. Two-tailed t-test of independent samples is reported in 'diff' columns (2020-2017), *p<0.05. Red indicates that the standard deviation change was larger between 2017 and 2020 than in the comparing set of years (2013 to 2017).*

Beginning with Germany in Table A1, we show the weighted mean values for 2020 in relation to the weighted mean values for 2017, along with the confidence intervals around each point estimate. In general, we observe that the average scores for EQI core questions in Germany have made modest, yet significant changes for most questions comparing 2020 and 2017, where t-test differences of means yields a significant change in 8 or 14 items (*p<0.05). Morover, in only three of these cases (impartiality in education 1, corruption in education and law enforcement), the scores imply higher QoG, not lower.

To put these findings into context we also compare similar changes from 2013 to 2017. We see that from 2017 to 2020 that the changes were larger in terms of standard deviation increases from one round to the next (marked in bold red), with the exception being the three questions on impartiality, which were showed larger declines from 2013 to 2017 than from 2017 to 2020. Overall, the changes are larger from 2017 to 2020, but the majority of these reflect positive and statistically significant changes.

Table A2: Comparing Italy's scores over past 3 EQI rounds on Core Questions

Indicator	**2020**	**95% c.i.**	**2017**	**95% c.i.**	**diff.**	**s.d. diff.**	**2013-17**	**s.d. diff**
qualEd10	6.82	6.63,7.0	6.08	6.03,6.13	0.73*	0.34	-0.51	-0.24
qualHel10	6.7	6.5,6.9	5.83	5.78,5.88	0.87*	0.37	-0.46	-0.2
qualLaw10	6.77	6.56,6.99	6.26	6.21,6.31	0.52*	0.24	-0.58	-0.26

impEd10	6.49	6.21,6.76	5.95	5.89,6.01	0.54*	0.2	-0.81	-0.3
impHel10	5.87	5.59,6.15	5.61	5.55,5.67	0.26	0.09	-0.26	-0.09
impLaw10	6.39	6.11,6.67	6.04	5.98,6.1	0.35*	0.13	-0.98	-0.37
impEd2	3.01	2.93,3.09	2.72	2.7,2.74	0.29	0.27	-0.18	-0.17
impHel2	2.92	2.82,3.01	2.59	2.57,2.61	0.32*	0.31	-0.06	-0.06
impLaw2	2.93	2.84,3.02	2.79	2.76,2.81	0.14*	0.14	-0.21	-0.2
corrEd10	6.83	6.57,7.1	6.22	6.16,6.28	0.61*	0.22	-1.01	-0.37
corrHel10	6.44	6.15,6.73	5.83	5.7,5.89	0.61*	0.22	-0.25	-0.09
corrLaw10	6.6	6.31,6.88	6.24	6.18,6.3	0.36*	0.13	-0.97	-0.36
need10	6.62	6.32,6.92	6.61	6.55,6.67	0.01	0		
greed10	6.3	6.01,6.6	6.18	6.11,6.24	0.13	0.05		

*Note: weighted means reported. Number of observations for 2020 and 2017 is 278 and 7,985 respectively. Two-tailed t-test of independent samples is reported in 'diff' columns (2020-2017), *p<0.05. Red indicates that the standard deviation change was larger between 2017 and 2020 than in the comparing set of years (2013 to 2017).*

Next, we look at the results from the Italian respondents during the sample time periods in Table A2. The results are remarkably consistent – in all cases, Italians rate their services more favorably in terms of QoG across the board. Moreover, in all cases save the 'need' and 'greed' corruption questions, the positive differences in 2020 from 2017 are statistically significant. However, looking at the context of the previous period, in which every indicator in 2017 dropped from 2013, the magnitude of the changes are on average not as great as the decline from the previous period's change on average (2103 to 2017). In other words, for the comparable 12 questions, the magnitude of the (negative) change from 2013 to 2017 was greater than the (positive) changes in 2017 to 2020. Although causality is impossible to prove with this data, we can confirm that Covid-19 has not negatively affected the attitude of institutional quality in Italy, if anything, it has helped recover them closer to the 2013 levels.

Finally, we look at Romania during the same period. In general, we see very little significant movement in mean responses to comparable questions over time in Romania – attitudes appear quite fixed, While 6 of 14 differences being positive and 8 of 14 negative compared with 2017, very few are statistically significant. The exception in the 2017 to 2020 data are questions regarding impartiality; in which 4 of the 6 impartiality questions have dropped significantly in 2020 from 2017, by a magnitude of roughly 0.20 to 0.25 standard deviations.

The comparison with 2013 to 2017 changes show also that Romanians tend to give fairly con-

sistent answers to the QoG questions in the aggregate, with comparatively high satisfaction in the quality of services, moderate scores on impartiality and high perceptions of corruption across the board. While the 2020 sample shows a drop in impartiality from 2017, the 2017 also showed a significant drop in the three service corruption scores from 2013, all of which ticked up again in 2020. Thus, if there are effects of Covid-19 on Romanian respondents, they are in the perceptions of how citizens are impartiality treated in getting public services, yet not in any other area.

Table A3: Comparing Romania's scores over past 3 EQI rounds on Core Questions

Indicator	**2020**	**95% c.i.**	**2017**	**95% c.i.**	**diff.**	**s.d. diff.**	**2013-17**	**s.d. diff**
qualEd10	6.91	6.6,7.22	6.71	6.65,6.77	0.2	0.1	-0.14	-0.07
qualHel10	6.52	6.17,6.87	6.21	6.13,6.29	0.31	0.13	-0.03	-0.01
qualLaw10	6.71	6.36,7.06	6.83	6.76,6.89	-0.12	-0.06	0	0
impEd10	5.35	4.93,5.76	6.06	5.9,6.16	-0.71*	-0.23	-0.32	-0.11
impHel10	4.64	4.24,5.03	5.39	5.29,5.5	-0.75*	-0.24	-0.34	-0.11
impLaw10	5.04	4.6,5.48	5.79	5.69,5.9	-0.75*	-0.24	-0.44	-0.14
impEd2	2.67	2.53,2.81	2.84	2.8,2.87	-0.16	-0.17	-0.01	-0.01
impHel2	2.48	2.34,2.61	2.48	2.45,2.51	0	0	-0.06	-0.06
impLaw2	2.5	2.36,2.64	2.71	2.68,2.74	-0.21*	-0.22	0.03	0.03
corrEd10	5.34	4.92,5.76	5.1	5.01,5.19	0.24	0.09	-1.1	-0.4
corrHel10	4.59	4.18 4.99	4.38	4.3,4.47	0.2	0.08	-0.84	-0.32
corrLaw10	4.84	4.41,5.26	4.79	4.7,4.88	0.05	0.02	-0.95	-0.34
need10	5.05	4.64,5.46	5.16	5.06,5.25	-0.11	-0.04		
greed10	4.7	4.28,5.13	5	4.9,5.09	-0.29	-0.1		

*Note: weighted means reported. Number of observations for 2020 and 2017 is 234 and 3,444 respectively. First set of impartiality questions and corruption questions are reversed ordered. Two-tailed t-test of independent samples is reported in 'diff' columns (2020-2017), *p<0.05. Red indicates that the standard deviation change was larger between 2017 and 2020 than in the comparing set of years (2013 to 2017).*

Finally, we look at changes in self-reported personal experiences with petty corruption in the three countries. For proper comparison, we use only telephone (CATI) interviews from 2020, as the possible social desirability bias from telephone interviews compared with the more anonymous online administration is held constant over time.

The three countries again tell somewhat divergent stories. In the case of Germany, we see small and insignificant positive change in 2020 compared with 2017, yet all proportions are at 0.02 (2%) or less in both years thus the self-reported personal experiences were low in 2017 and remain such in 2020. We do however see a small and significant change in paying a bribe on whole from 0.6% in 2017 to 2.7% in 2020, mainly driven by a small uptick in within the health care sector.

In the case of Italy, there again is no ambiguity of the results – self-reported bribery is significantly down for every indicator save one - being asked by law enforcement, which also shows a negative (yet insignificant) trend nonetheless. The results are strongest for the 'having paid' set of indicators, with the self-reported bribe-paying for a service overall down from 17.4% in 2017 to an estimated 5.5% in 2020. It is noteworthy that even the online estimate for total paid bribes (0.10, with a 95% c.i. of 0.073, 0.126) shows a statistically significant drop compared with the all-CATI respondents from 2017. Thus, like the perceptions of QoG questions showing near uniform improvement in Italy between 2020 and 2017, we observe a considerable decrease in the rate of corruption experiences.

Finally, our findings for Romania are less consistent than the largely insignificant change in Germany and near uniform improvements in Italy. Here we observe that there is a significant increase in direct experiences with corruption in education (both being asked, and paying), with both more than doubling, along with a significant increase in self-reported paying in health care, from 11% to 18%. The rate of overall bribe-paying experience also ticked up significantly from roughly 14% in 2017 to just over 21% in 2020. Whether this increase is due to Covid-19 is uncertain – the country's average bribe paying rate in 2013 was 27%, thus 2017 could have reflected an exceptional time.

Table A4: Changes in Experiences with Public Sector Petty Corruption Table

Indicator	**2020**	**95% c.i.**	**2017**	**95% c.i.**	**diff.**
Germany					
ed_ask1	0.013	0.002 0.024	0.004	0.002 0.005	0.009
hel_ask1	0.012	0.002 0.022	0.01	0.008 0.012	0.002
law_ask1	0.007	-0.001 0.016	0.003	0.002 0.005	0.004
$other_ask1$	0.012	0.002 0.021	0.007	0.005 0.009	0.005
ed_pay1	0.007	0 0.013	0.003	0.001 0.004	0.004
hel_pay1	0.018	0.006 0.03	0.006	0.004 0.008	0.012
law_pay1	0.003	-0.003 0.009	0.002	0.001 0.002	0.001
$other_pay1$	0.008	0.001 0.016	0.003	0.001 0.004	0.006
askBribeTotal	0.021	0.008 0.034	0.017	0.014 0.02	0.004
payBribeTotal	0.027	0.012 0.042	0.008	0.006 0.01	0.020*

Italy					
ed_ask1	0.012	0.002 0.021	0.05	0.045 0.055	-0.038*
hel_ask1	0.051	0.032 0.071	0.082	0.076 0.088	-0.031*
law_ask1	0.025	0.011 0.039	0.043	0.039 0.048	-0.018
$other_ask1$	0.013	0.003 0.022	0.034	0.03 0.038	-0.022*
ed_pay1	0.002	-0.002 0.006	0.095	0.089 0.102	-0.093*
hel_pay1	0.043	0.025 0.062	0.114	0.107 0.12	-0.070*
law_pay1	0.014	0.004 0.025	0.066	0.06 0.071	-0.051*
$other_pay1$	0.002	-0.002 0.006	0.04	0.035 0.044	-0.037*
askBribeTotal	0.086	0.061 0.111	0.124	0.117 0.131	-0.038*
payBribeTotal	0.055	0.034 0.074	0.174	0.166 0.182	-0.121*
Romania					
ed_ask1	0.083	0.056 0.11	0.037	0.031 0.043	0.046*
hel_ask1	0.108	0.079 0.137	0.093	0.083 0.102	0.015
law_ask1	0.018	0.004 0.031	0.027	0.022 0.033	-0.01
$other_ask1$	0.047	0.027 0.067	0.036	0.03 0.042	0.011
ed_pay1	0.084	0.057 0.111	0.038	0.031 0.044	0.046*
hel_pay1	0.18	0.144 0.215	0.108	0.098 0.118	0.072*
law_pay1	0.013	0.001 0.024	0.024	0.019 0.029	-0.012
$other_pay1$	0.031	0.015 0.048	0.031	0.025 0.037	0
askBribeTotal	0.145	0.112 0.178	0.126	0.115 0.137	0.019
payBribeTotal	0.212	0.174 0.25	0.139	0.128 0.15	0.073*

*Note: weighted proportions reported with 95% confidence intervals around the point estimate. Two-tailed t-test of independent samples is reported in 'diff' column (2020-2017), *p<0.05.*

10.4 Conclusions from the pilot analysis

In sum, the analyses here have attempted to gauge the effect, if any, of Covid-19 on responses to EQI core questions on perceptions and experiences with QoG. While the limited sample sizes of the 2020 pilot do not warrant a detailed regional comparative analysis over time, we can compare pooled effects as well as country means and proportions over time. The results of the above analyses are the following:

- Overall, citizens show strikingly high satisfaction with the handling of Covid-19 by the authorities in their area. Germany shows the highest rates of satisfaction, followed by Romania and Italy, with at least 82% in all three countries reporting or more claiming the authorities have been 'very good' or 'somewhat good'.

- There is an association between attitudes on Covid-19 and QoG questions. In particular, and not surprisingly, those that rate the responses to Covid-19 more positively also perceive and experience better QoG across the board. In terms of personal worry, the effect of economic worry tend to be associated with higher QoG in most cases, while personal health worries are uncorrelated with questions of QoG, holding constant other factors.

- In comparing the mean response to the comparable EQI perception questions over time, we found that there are indeed some changes, but they are quite country-specific. In Germany and Italy, perceptions of QoG are on average significantly higher in 2020 compared with 2017, in particular in Italy. In Romania, we observe largely negligible change, yet there are significant declines in the perceptions of most impartiality questions. However, for the most part, the changes from 2017 to 2020 are comparable with the change from 2013 to 2017 in terms of standard deviation increases/decreases of the item in question. The exception being possibly Germany, whereby the positive changes from 2017 to 2020 appear slightly larger than change from the previous period.

- In terms of changes in corruption experiences over time, again, we observe quite country-specific effects. In the case of Italy, we see a uniform and significant decline in rates of corruption experiences in all sectors for both being asked to pay and paying a bribe for a service. In Germany, the overall rate of self-reported bribe-paying ticked up (from 0.6% to 2.7%), yet all other indicators show negligible changes over time. In Romania, we see a

significant increase in bribe experiences in education and health care from 2017 to 2020, as well as the overall rate of bribe-paying up from 14% to 21% in 2020. Yet in this case, the overall rate is still lower than the self-reported rate of 27% in 2013, thus it is difficult to assess if Covid-19 is the cause of this uptick, or if 2017 was an exceptional year.

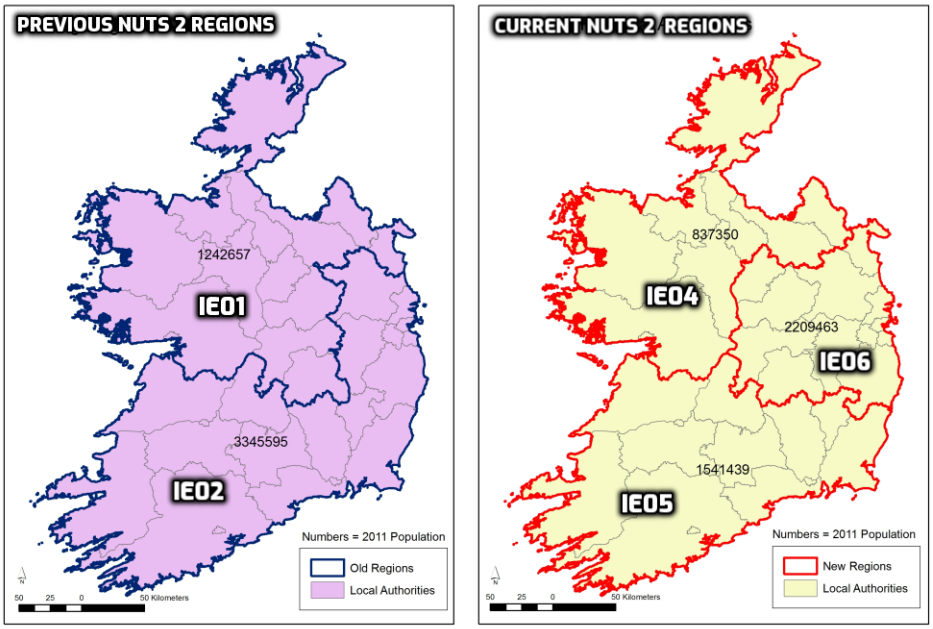
Overall, the analysis shows that on whole, the responses to the EQI core questions from the pilot were not negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis. In the case of Italy, and for the most part in Germany, we might maintain the opposite – that perceptions of QoG have improved since 2017. Whether this is due to Covid-19 is impossible to say, yet we can concluded that there is not a negative effect of the crisis on our estimate for these two countries. For Romania, the results show lower QoG in some areas (impartiality perceptions and direct experiences), but unchanged in most other indicators. One conclusion we might draw is that since the overall perception of handling by the authorities is quite positive, perceptions in state capacity by citizens has been enhanced.

10.5 Comparing Irish regions over time

For the previous three rounds of the EQI, the Irish NUTS 2 regions had been measured according to the past boundaries which ceased to exist due to to Statutory instrument No. 573/2014[19], passed by the Irish assembly and approved by the EU Commission. Previously, there were two NUTS 2 regions (IE01 - Border, Midland and Western and IE02 - Southern and Eastern), which are shown on the left side of the figure below. Currently, due to the reforms, there are three NUTS 2 regions - IE04 (Northern and Western), IE05 (Southern) and IE06 (Eastern and Midland). The main issue with the Irish cases, is that there is a complete discontinuity from the previous scheme to the current one, whereby none of the previous two regions exist as they were geographically. For example, we see that while IE05 and IE06 are mostly a split from the previous IE02, IE06 actually does take several counties from previous IE01 as well, such as Laois, Longford, Offaly and Wastmeath, which were previous part of the Border, Midland and Western region (IE01), yet are are now all part of the greater Dublin region (IE06). Moreover, Louth county also went from IE01 to now IE06. These changes mean that there are no clean comparisons over time a the NUTS 2 level in Ireland from this EQI round with the previous ones as seen in Figure 9.

[19] see: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/si/573/made/en/print

Figure 9: **Irish NUTS 2 Regions Pre/Post Reform**

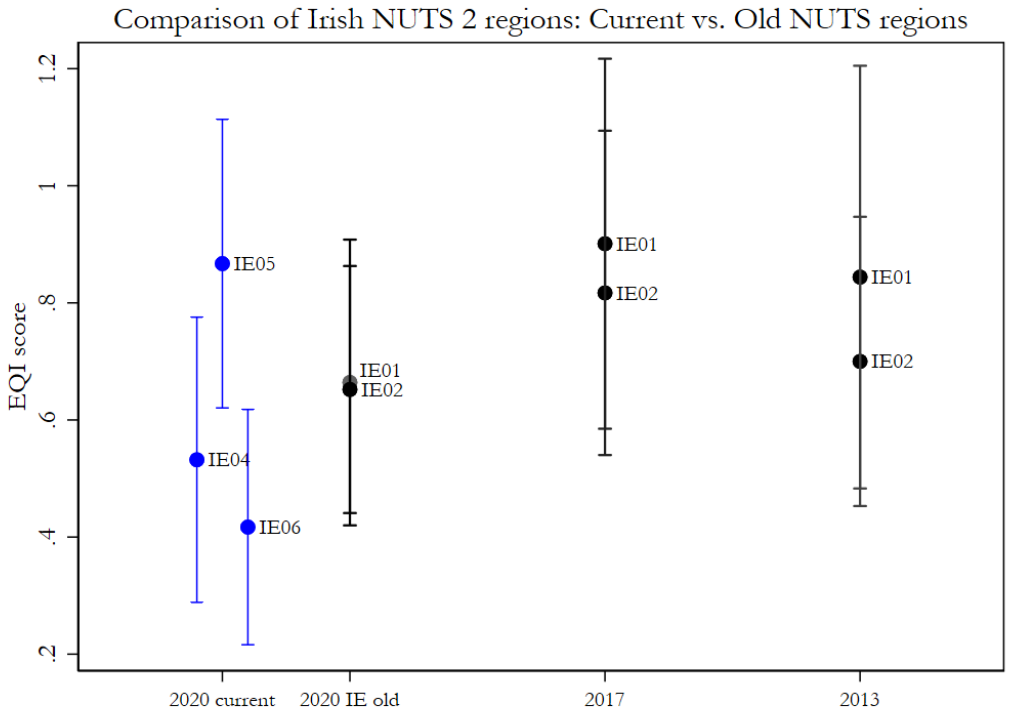


Note: Red lines show the previous and current NUTS 2 regions. Population (at the time of reform) is shown by region.

The geographic changes therefore present us with a choice in terms of over time comparisons of both the Irish regions, as well as for the EQI EU27 sample on whole, which requires a common sample of regions for each year in the data for the most valid temporal comparisons. We essentially have therefore two options for the Irish regions when comparison over time. First, we could simply apply the country-level WGI averages to the three current Irish regions for the 2010-2017 years so that we have the same number of Irish regions in all years of the data. This would essentially wipe away any past variation observed in the previous data, yet be most valid for the current NUTS scheme.

Second, as an alternative, we could re-aggregate the 2020 Irish data to the previous NUTS 2 scheme and use these figures for our over time comparisons, counting just the two Irish NUTS 2 regions for all four years of the EQI. As we have respondent's post-codes in the 2020, this is entirely possible to do and thus we can simply continue the previous NUTS scheme into 2020 with the old regions prior to the reforms.

Figure 10: **EQI Score Irish NUTS 2 Regions over time**



Note: Blue dots show the current Irish NUTS scheme, while black dots show the previous ones. Margins of error are provided around the estimates. The 2020 black dots have been re-calculated using respondent post-codes.

We present Figure 10 to help us assess which alternative is most optimal. In essence, we are looking to exploit the most regional variation possible. We compare the within-country variation of the current NUTS 3 regions (blue dots) with that of the previous NUTS 2 regional scheme for 2017 and 2013[20]. The Figure reveals that while IE01 ranked higher than IE02, there was no significant within-country variation between the previous NUTS 2 regions in either 2013 or 2017. The re-calculated scores for 2020 show the exact same pattern, yet with even less regional difference between former IE01 and IE02. However, when looking at the 2020 EQI within-country variation for the newer, three Irish regions, we observe more interesting within-country variation that was overlooked by the previous boundaries. For example, we now see that there is a rather considerable gap between IE05 and IE06, the two regions than mainly composed IE02 previously. Thus, given that the previous variation between IE01 and IE02 was negligible, we proceed with option 1 listed above, and apply the WGI country-level values for the previous to the current three Irish NUTS region for purposes of comparison over time and to maximize the most relevant variation in the data, which we clearly see is in the current NUTS scheme.

[20] As Ireland was not included in the 2010 regional survey, the country level WGI scores were applied to the 2 Irish regions.

10.6 Full List of 2021 Estimates

Name	Nuts	Quality	Impart.	Corrupt.	EQI	low c.i.	high c.i.
Reg. Brussels	BE1	-0.191	-0.076	-0.081	-0.121	-0.422	0.180
Flanders	BE2	0.559	0.60	0.889	0.709	0.380	1.040
Wallonie	BE3	0.052	0.446	0.764	0.436	0.225	0.647
Severozapaden	BG31	-1.732	-1.89	-0.946	-1.581	-1.905	-1.257
Severen tsentralen	BG32	-1.349	-1.383	-0.846	-1.238	-1.558	-0.918
Severoiztochen	BG33	-1.223	-1.829	-1.557	-1.596	-1.847	-1.345
Yugoiztochen	BG34	-1.046	-1.585	-1.423	-1.403	-1.712	-1.094
Yugozapaden	BG41	-1.66	-1.528	-2.042	-1.81	-2.165	-1.455
Yuzhen tsentralen	BG42	-1.216	-1.257	-0.948	-1.184	-1.498	-0.870
Cyprus	CY	-0.019	-0.44	-0.452	-0.315	-0.802	0.172
Praha	CZ01	-0.096	0.451	-0.566	-0.073	-0.353	0.207
Střední Cechy	CZ02	-0.409	0.149	-0.592	-0.295	-0.513	-0.077
Jihozápad	CZ03	-0.307	-0.1	-0.524	-0.322	-0.513	-0.131
Severozápad	CZ04	-0.613	-0.403	-0.754	-0.613	-0.793	-0.433
Severovýchod	CZ05	-0.118	0.197	-0.417	-0.117	-0.313	0.079
Jihovýchod	CZ06	-0.222	-0.004	-0.401	-0.217	-0.409	-0.025
Střední Morava	CZ07	-0.159	-0.169	-0.65	-0.339	-0.540	-0.138
Moravskoslezsko	CZ08	-0.255	-0.195	-0.797	-0.431	-0.640	-0.222
Hovedstaden	DK01	1.438	1.224	1.006	1.27	1.066	1.474
Sjælland	DK02	0.765	1.137	1.651	1.23	0.966	1.494
Syddanmark	DK03	1.515	1.292	1.606	1.527	1.361	1.693
Midtjylland	DK04	1.762	1.434	1.719	1.701	1.583	1.819
Nordjylland	DK05	1.713	1.471	1.568	1.645	1.491	1.799
Baden-Württemberg	DE1	0.93	0.694	1.007	0.911	0.719	1.103
Bayern	DE2	1.17	0.986	1.198	1.161	0.995	1.327
Berlin	DE3	-0.083	0.177	0.795	0.308	0.004	0.612
Brandenburg	DE4	0.401	1.219	1.255	0.995	0.721	1.269
Bremen	DE5	-0.074	0.301	1.105	0.461	0.067	0.855
Hamburg	DE6	1.089	0.803	0.902	0.967	0.803	1.131
Hessen	DE7	0.815	0.902	1.265	1.032	0.856	1.208
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	DE8	0.819	1.1	1.325	1.123	0.936	1.310
Niedersachsen	DE9	0.958	1.014	1.318	1.139	0.945	1.333
Nordrhein-Westfalen	DEA	0.82	0.847	1.108	0.96	0.763	1.157
Rheinland-Pfalz	DEB	1.087	1.029	1.541	1.266	1.045	1.487
Saarland	DEC	0.854	1.052	1.082	1.034	0.840	1.228
Sachsen	DED	0.815	0.742	1.323	0.997	0.788	1.206
Sachsen-Anhalt	DEE	0.423	0.821	1.237	0.859	0.588	1.130
Schleswig-Holstein	DEF	1.025	1.295	1.305	1.255	1.059	1.451
Thüringen	DEG	0.778	1.084	1.233	1.071	0.897	1.245
Estonia	EE	0.298	0.358	0.729	0.48	0.216	0.744
Northern and Western	IE04	0.441	0.652	0.444	0.532	0.288	0.776
Southern	IE05	0.761	0.716	1.029	0.867	0.621	1.113
Eastern and Midland	IE06	0.431	0.35	0.424	0.417	0.216	0.618
Attiki	EL30	-0.922	-1.224	-1.244	-1.173	-1.517	-0.829
Voreio Aigaio	EL41	-0.349	-1.262	-1.674	-1.137	-1.530	-0.744

Notio Aigaio	EL42	-0.564	-1.213	-1.869	-1.262	-1.695	-0.829
Kriti	EL43	-0.502	-1.462	-1.486	-1.194	-1.534	-0.854
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	EL51	-0.063	-1.345	-0.817	-0.771	-0.995	-0.547
Kentriki Makedonia	EL52	-1.05	-1.207	-0.885	-1.088	-1.463	-0.713
Dytiki Makedonia	EL53	-0.752	-1.321	-0.809	-0.998	-1.278	-0.718
Ipeiros	EL54	0.299	-1.318	-1.317	-0.809	-1.144	-0.474
Thessalia	EL61	-0.349	-1.453	-1.214	-1.044	-1.283	-0.805
Ionia Nisia	EL62	-1.191	-1.376	-1.527	-1.417	-1.842	-0.992
Dytiki Ellada	EL63	-0.664	-1.706	-1.853	-1.462	-1.783	-1.141
Sterea Ellada	EL64	-1.147	-1.385	-1.329	-1.337	-1.672	-1.002
Peloponnisos	EL65	-0.609	-1.095	-1.058	-0.956	-1.280	-0.632
Galicia	ES11	-0.097	-0.354	-0.428	-0.304	-0.551	-0.057
Principado de Asturias	ES12	0.554	0.853	0.375	0.617	0.478	0.756
Cantabria	ES13	0.114	0.197	-0.003	0.107	-0.048	0.262
País Vasco	ES21	1.042	1.17	0.586	0.969	0.563	1.375
Navarra	ES22	1.032	0.775	0.251	0.712	0.530	0.894
La Rioja	ES23	1.374	0.632	0.435	0.845	0.571	1.119
Aragón	ES24	0.009	-0.254	-0.309	-0.192	-0.430	0.046
Madrid	ES30	0.328	-0.45	-0.533	-0.227	-0.594	0.140
Castilla y León	ES41	-0.308	-0.08	-0.251	-0.221	-0.450	0.008
Castilla-la Mancha	ES42	0.323	0.344	0.124	0.274	0.103	0.445
Extremadura	ES43	0.549	0.5	0.229	0.442	0.265	0.619
Cataluña	ES51	-0.484	-0.526	-1.011	-0.7	-0.954	-0.446
Valenciana	ES52	0.274	0.623	-0.079	0.283	0.095	0.471
Illes Balears	ES53	0.039	0.374	0.102	0.178	0.004	0.352
Andalucía	ES61	-0.431	-0.565	-0.555	-0.537	-0.846	-0.228
Región de Murcia	ES62	0.024	0.351	-0.507	-0.046	-0.176	0.084
Canarias	ES70	-0.226	-0.464	-0.797	-0.515	-0.752	-0.278
Île de France	FR10	-0.051	0.468	-0.03	0.134	-0.127	0.395
Centre - Val de Loire	FRB0	0.368	0.894	0.811	0.718	0.526	0.910
Bourgogne	FRC1	0.352	0.516	0.68	0.536	0.309	0.763
Franche-Comté	FRC2	0.446	0.399	0.665	0.523	0.258	0.788
Basse-Normandie	FRD1	0.764	0.696	0.732	0.759	0.512	1.006
Haute-Normandie	FRD2	0.432	0.62	0.575	0.563	0.314	0.812
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	FRE1	0.745	0.379	0.04	0.403	0.139	0.667
Picardie	FRE2	0.432	0.278	0.256	0.335	0.104	0.566
Alsace	FRF1	0.928	0.577	0.611	0.733	0.442	1.024
Champagne-Ardenne	FRF2	0.655	0.38	0.616	0.572	0.298	0.847
Lorraine	FRF3	0.459	0.576	0.446	0.513	0.323	0.703
Pays-de-la-Loire	FRG0	0.686	0.854	0.868	0.833	0.628	1.038
Bretagne	FRH0	0.989	0.806	1.041	0.981	0.721	1.241
Aquitaine	FRI1	0.806	0.734	0.743	0.791	0.552	1.030
Limousin	FRI2	0.534	0.67	0.834	0.705	0.461	0.949
Poitou-Charentes	FRI3	0.529	0.713	0.827	0.716	0.492	0.940
Languedoc-Roussillon	FRJ1	0.285	0.382	0.4	0.369	0.127	0.611
Midi-Pyrénées	FRJ2	0.731	0.641	0.65	0.7	0.438	0.962
Auvergne	FRK1	0.461	0.558	0.718	0.601	0.367	0.835
Rhône-Alpes	FRK2	0.65	0.519	0.394	0.541	0.288	0.794

Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	FRL0	0.417	0.581	0.28	0.442	0.227	0.657
Corse	FRM0	0.481	0.583	-0.135	0.322	0.090	0.554
Guadeloupe	FRY1	-1.158	-0.265	-0.096	-0.526	-0.917	-0.135
Martinique	FRY2	-1.031	-0.159	0.408	-0.271	-0.688	0.146
Guyane	FRY3	-1.578	-0.379	0.05	-0.66	-1.069	-0.251
La Réunion	FRY4	0.289	0.282	-0.046	0.182	-0.154	0.518
Mayotte	FRY5	-2.275	-0.3	-0.772	-1.159	-1.515	-0.803
Jadranska Hrvatska	HR03	-1.157	-0.736	-0.472	-0.819	-1.249	-0.389
Kontinentalna Hrvatska	HR04	-1.184	-1.183	-1.356	-1.289	-1.708	-0.870
Piemonte	ITC1	-0.258	-0.831	-0.404	-0.517	-0.672	-0.362
Valle d'Aosta	ITC2	0.011	-0.769	-0.757	-0.524	-0.737	-0.311
Liguria	ITC3	-0.497	-0.831	-0.493	-0.63	-0.820	-0.440
Lombardia	ITC4	-0.236	-1.219	-0.894	-0.813	-0.999	-0.627
Abruzzo	ITF1	-1.013	-1.254	-0.944	-1.111	-1.329	-0.893
Molise	ITF2	-1.316	-1.29	-0.922	-1.221	-1.559	-0.883
Campania	ITF3	-2.114	-1.567	-1.896	-1.931	-2.246	-1.616
Puglia	ITF4	-1.391	-1.413	-1.088	-1.347	-1.658	-1.036
Basilicata	ITF5	-1.317	-1.638	-1.198	-1.438	-1.723	-1.153
Calabria	ITF6	-2.145	-2.238	-1.646	-2.087	-2.557	-1.617
Sicilia	ITG1	-1.095	-1.509	-1.335	-1.364	-1.647	-1.081
Sardegna	ITG2	-1.159	-1.571	-0.932	-1.268	-1.507	-1.029
Bolzano/Bozen	ITH1	0.322	-0.732	-0.316	-0.251	-0.432	-0.070
Trento	ITH2	0.658	-0.352	-0.282	0.01	-0.154	0.174
Veneto	ITH3	0.409	-0.648	-0.193	-0.15	-0.371	0.071
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	ITH4	0.358	-0.422	-0.111	-0.061	-0.182	0.060
Emilia-Romagna	ITH5	0.331	-0.909	-0.535	-0.385	-0.575	-0.195
Toscana	ITI1	0.033	-0.63	-0.442	-0.36	-0.484	-0.236
Umbria	ITI2	-0.331	-1.131	-0.658	-0.734	-0.941	-0.527
Marche	ITI3	-0.609	-0.986	-0.559	-0.746	-0.941	-0.551
Lazio	ITI4	-1.087	-1.241	-1.158	-1.207	-1.422	-0.992
Latvia	LV	-0.244	-0.058	-0.601	-0.312	-0.495	-0.129
Sostines regionas	LT01	0.042	0.161	-0.132	0.025	-0.310	0.360
Vidurio ir vakaru	LT02	-0.058	-0.121	-0.457	-0.22	-0.610	0.170
Luxembourg	LU	1.121	1.135	1.444	1.281	1.104	1.458
Budapest	HU11	-1.398	-0.749	-1.658	-1.317	-1.819	-0.815
Pest	HU12	-1.271	-0.425	-0.927	-0.908	-1.364	-0.452
Közép-Dunántúl	HU21	-1.475	-0.746	-0.876	-1.072	-1.451	-0.693
Nyugat-Dunántúl	HU22	-1.283	-0.905	-1.052	-1.122	-1.519	-0.725
Dél-Dunántúl	HU23	-1.25	-0.872	-0.83	-1.022	-1.369	-0.675
Észak-Magyarország	HU31	-1.907	-1.078	-1.43	-1.528	-1.958	-1.098
Észak-Alföld	HU32	-1.396	-1.353	-1.534	-1.482	-1.838	-1.126
Dél-Alföld	HU33	-1.175	-0.662	-1.104	-1.018	-1.424	-0.612
Malta	MT	-0.12	-0.149	-0.909	-0.408	-0.926	0.11
Groningen	NL11	1.361	1.391	1.137	1.346	1.066	1.626
Friesland (NL)	NL12	1.562	1.465	1.743	1.651	1.469	1.833
Drenthe	NL13	1.315	1.558	1.575	1.54	1.344	1.736
Overijssel	NL21	1.357	1.318	1.603	1.481	1.305	1.657

Gelderland	NL22	1.477	1.537	1.62	1.604	1.414	1.794
Flevoland	NL23	1.028	1.132	1.368	1.221	1.046	1.396
Utrecht	NL31	1.141	1.22	0.981	1.157	0.884	1.430
Noord-Holland	NL32	1.249	0.899	0.794	1.019	0.751	1.287
Zuid-Holland	NL33	1.228	1.051	1.363	1.261	1.047	1.475
Zeeland	NL34	1.056	1.389	1.139	1.24	0.966	1.514
Noord-Brabant	NL41	1.363	1.088	1.38	1.326	1.128	1.524
Limburg (NL)	NL42	1.269	1.051	1.489	1.318	1.156	1.480
Burgenland (AT)	AT11	0.842	1.108	0.763	0.939	0.769	1.109
Niederösterreich	AT12	0.865	1.491	0.889	1.123	0.977	1.269
Wien	AT13	0.503	0.965	0.6	0.716	0.518	0.914
Kärnten	AT21	0.677	1.168	0.733	0.892	0.722	1.062
Steiermark	AT22	0.742	1.571	0.697	1.042	0.937	1.147
Oberösterreich	AT31	0.61	1.373	0.766	0.951	0.794	1.108
Salzburg	AT32	0.922	1.342	0.659	1.012	0.857	1.167
Tirol	AT33	1.037	1.042	0.778	0.989	0.801	1.177
Vorarlberg	AT34	1.159	1.089	0.819	1.062	0.811	1.313
Malopolskie	PL21	-0.507	-0.924	-0.632	-0.714	-0.935	-0.493
Slaskie	PL22	-0.6	-0.758	-0.252	-0.557	-0.801	-0.313
Wielkopolskie	PL41	-0.473	-0.888	-0.334	-0.587	-0.827	-0.347
Zachodniopomorskie	PL42	-1.126	-0.981	-0.457	-0.888	-1.154	-0.622
Lubuskie	PL43	-0.627	-0.772	-0.208	-0.557	-0.829	-0.285
Dolnoslaskie	PL51	-0.697	-0.742	-0.785	-0.77	-0.994	-0.546
Opolskie	PL52	-0.688	-0.348	0.055	-0.34	-0.626	-0.054
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	PL61	-0.74	-0.73	-0.521	-0.689	-0.899	-0.479
Warminsko-Mazurskie	PL62	-0.936	-0.914	-0.49	-0.81	-1.056	-0.564
Pomorskie	PL63	-0.755	-0.836	0.177	-0.489	-0.829	-0.149
Lódzkie	PL71	-0.964	-0.801	-0.696	-0.852	-1.055	-0.649
Swietokrzyskie	PL72	-0.824	-0.984	-0.455	-0.783	-1.023	-0.543
Lubelskie	PL81	-1.084	-1.465	-0.598	-1.089	-1.374	-0.804
Podkarpackie	PL82	-0.837	-0.836	-0.379	-0.711	-0.952	-0.470
Podlaskie	PL84	-0.76	-1.105	-0.671	-0.878	-1.108	-0.648
Warszawski stoleczny	PL91	-1.558	-1.345	-0.647	-1.229	-1.632	-0.826
Mazowiecki reg.	PL92	-0.733	-0.921	-0.508	-0.748	-0.970	-0.526
Norte	PT11	0.612	0.083	-0.624	0.025	-0.393	0.443
Algarve	PT15	-0.125	0.153	-0.248	-0.076	-0.375	0.223
Centro (PT)	PT16	0.411	0.132	-0.078	0.161	-0.170	0.492
Lisboa	PT17	-0.052	0.307	0.156	0.142	-0.161	0.445
Alentejo	PT18	0.057	0.05	-0.25	-0.05	-0.349	0.249
Açores (PT)	PT20	0.422	-0.015	-0.442	-0.012	-0.268	0.244
Madeira (PT)	PT30	0.508	-0.393	-0.73	-0.213	-0.573	0.147
Nord-Vest	RO11	-1.514	-1.307	-1.279	-1.419	-1.747	-1.091
Centru	RO12	-1.417	-0.45	-0.564	-0.842	-1.104	-0.580
Nord-Est	RO21	-1.936	-1.271	-1.871	-1.758	-2.132	-1.384
Sud-Est	RO22	-2.323	-0.897	-1.483	-1.628	-1.957	-1.299
Sud - Muntenia	RO31	-1.924	-0.971	-1.19	-1.414	-1.683	-1.145
Bucuresti - Ilfov	RO32	-2.352	-1.698	-2.198	-2.163	-2.529	-1.797
Sud-Vest Oltenia	RO41	-2.119	-0.801	-1.27	-1.45	-1.746	-1.154
Vest	RO42	-1.736	-0.829	-0.888	-1.195	-1.464	-0.926

Vzhodna Slovenija	SI03	-0.061	-0.319	-0.258	-0.221	-0.477	0.035
Zahodna Slovenija	SI04	0.072	0.596	0.149	0.283	0.014	0.552
Bratislavský kraj	SK01	-1.092	-0.696	-0.847	-0.912	-1.187	-0.637
Západné Slovensko	SK02	-0.341	-0.714	-0.721	-0.615	-0.814	-0.416
Stredné Slovensko	SK03	-0.484	-0.559	-0.616	-0.574	-0.799	-0.349
Východné Slovensko	SK04	-0.51	-0.938	-1.021	-0.855	-1.040	-0.670
Länsi-Suomi	FI19	1.328	1.456	1.355	1.433	1.240	1.626
Helsinki-Uusimaa	FI1B	1.582	1.505	1.621	1.629	1.462	1.796
Etelä-Suomi	FI1C	1.311	1.405	1.425	1.434	1.261	1.607
Pohjois- ja Itä-Suomi	FI1D	1.556	1.561	1.572	1.623	1.448	1.798
Åland	FI20	2.19	2.403	2.004	2.284	2.044	2.524
Stockholm	SE11	1.42	1.327	1.467	1.459	1.190	1.728
Östra Mellansverige	SE12	1.405	1.172	1.376	1.368	1.078	1.658
Småland med öarna	SE21	1.598	1.559	1.589	1.643	1.377	1.909
Sydsverige	SE22	1.364	1.295	1.288	1.366	1.129	1.603
Västsverige	SE23	1.28	1.309	1.566	1.438	1.175	1.701
Norra Mellansverige	SE31	1.022	1.282	1.502	1.318	1.000	1.636
Mellersta Norrland	SE32	1.093	1.429	1.002	1.22	0.970	1.470
Övre Norrland	SE33	1.552	1.412	1.73	1.625	1.367	1.883

11 Introduction to Part II: Why Spain and Poland?

Spain and Poland are two relatively similar, medium-large EU member states that can be seen as representative of the Old and New Europe, of Western and Eastern Europe. Spain is a relatively decentralised state and Poland is a relatively unitary one. Overall, the average level of quality of government of Spanish regions is close to the median level for the whole EU. It has been fairly stable since the first EQI round, although it has declined somewhat over time, from being slightly above the median level in 2010 to being slightly below in 2021. Poland offers a different evolution: on average the Polish regions have performed significantly better with each EQI round from 2010 up until 2017. Yet, in this latest round there has been a marked declined.

Within both countries there are regions with very diverse results, and very diverse trajectories, in the EQI. In Spain we have selected two regions that have traditionally been seen as similar – both being highly socioeconomically developed, early industrialisers, and having strong nationalist and separatist movements: Catalonia and the Basque Country. Nevertheless, from the first EQI round up to the present, Catalonia and the Basque Country have been at opposite extremes: while the Basque Country ranks the highest in Spain, Catalonia ranks the lowest. This divergence, far from reducing, has been increasing over time. What explains these stark differences between two otherwise historically similar regions?

In Poland we have selected two regions with important differences in EQI scores. Yet, in this case the paradox regards their trajectories as much as their current positions. Opolskie was the the lowest ranked region in the first round of the EQI (2010), but it has risen over time, and now ranks highest among Polish regions in 2021. This is a remarkable shift in citizens ratings of their region. Moreover, it was the only region in Poland not to decline from 2017 to 2021. What explains this change in Opolskie? Furthermore, while Opolskie records the largest improvement across time, Lubelskie presents the largest fall in EQI from the previous round (2017). What then explains these movements in opposite directions of these two Polish regions?

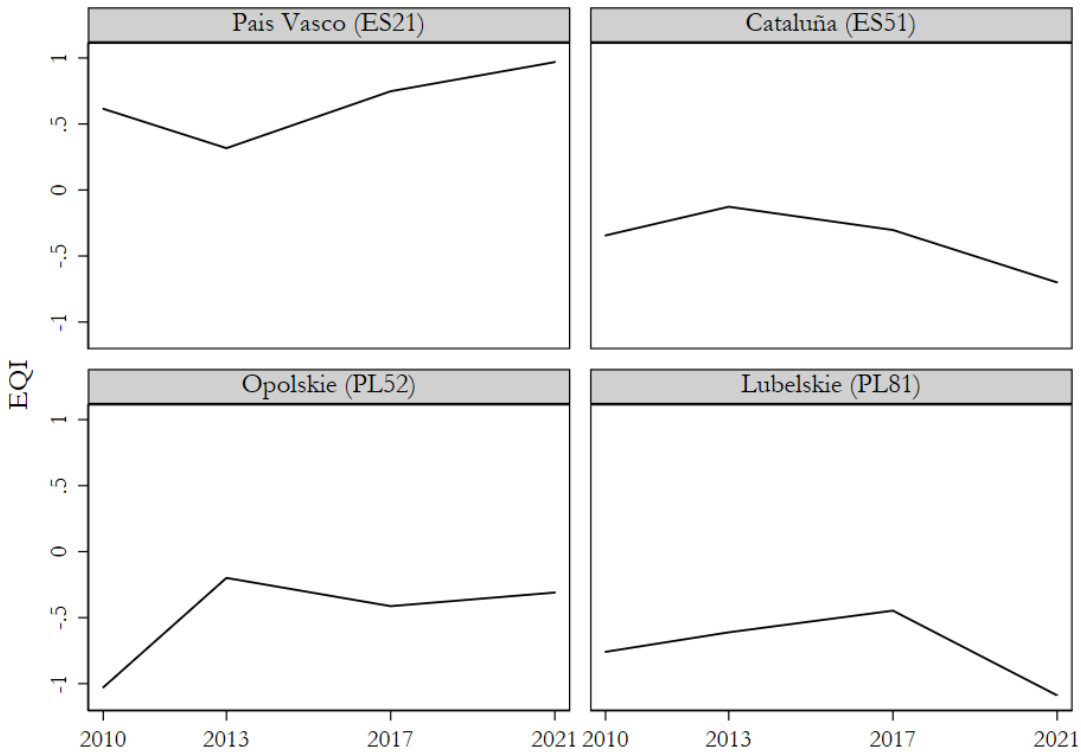
A complete answer to these questions is beyond the scope of this report, but, as we have aimed for in previous reports, our goal is to explore some tentative answers, based on a qualitative methodology. Our experts – Pablo Fernández-Vázquez, Paweł Chmieliński, and Barbara Wieliczko – have interviewed public officials, and representatives of business, media and civil society in the regions, asking them what are, in their view, the reasons behind the evolution of quality of government in their region. A note is in order here: as in the rest of the EQI study, in this qualitative section we do not focus exclusively on the quality of the public services delivered by the regional government but on those services delivered in the region, irrespective of whether they are provided by national, regional or local authorities. Our concern is the quality, impartiality, and lack of corruption of the services provided in the region, not whose responsibility they are.

In the first place, the report collects the views of experts regarding their own perceptions of the quality of government in their region irrespective of EQI ranking. Generally speaking, there is a pattern, according to which those respondents in the highest EQI regions (i.e. the Basque Country and Opolskie) tend to share a more homogeneous (and positive) view of the actual quality of government in their region. They consider that a large proportion of public officials devote significant attention to adequately providing public services to the population. Despite some doubts in the Opolskie region regarding impartiality, all experts in the Basque Country agreed that the region's high EQI score reflects the regional reality. By contrast, in those regions with relatively lower scores (i.e. Catalonia and Lubelskie) experts are more divided. Many of them think that the quality of their public institutions is neither worse nor better than in other regions.

There are also similarities between the Spanish and Polish studies as to what explains such regional differences. In the relatively high-performing regions (i.e. the Basque Country and Opolskie), intangible or 'soft' factors are underlined by experts, although they are slightly different in each case. While in Opolskie the fact that it is a

Figure 1: **Select Case Study Regions**

Figure 2: **Evolution of the EQI in the selected regions**



multicultural region, and thus more open and tolerant, is regarded as important, in the case of the Basque Country it is the fact that it is a relatively homogeneous region, and thus where social control and accountability are easier, that matters. Yet, in both cases experts underline the work ethos among civil servants, and also in the population at large, as a remarkable factor. That is, the idea that consistent work and progress, even if slow, should be better socially rewarded than seeking to get rich very quickly, predominates. In the Basque Country, experts agree on the utmost importance of the high level of social trust. Individuals from different class backgrounds are used to interacting in all sorts of social encounters, from gastronomic societies to civil society organisations. Similarly, historical participation in civic organisations, from fire brigades to socio-cultural association, is underlined by the experts in Opolskie as fundamental for understanding its current situation, as this created a tradition of working for the community. This idea is also echoed in the Basque Country.

Another important intangible is the high level of political, and even social, consensus in both Opolskie and in the Basque Country. In Opolskie, experts noted the historical legacy of a political culture based on dialogue and compromise. An example of this would be the peaceful coexistence between different cultures, from both Germany and the East. And, this could be reflected in the higher degree of cooperation between political representatives of different ideological opinions currently existing in the region. In the Basque Country, the main political dynamic, according to all experts, is the existence of a wide consensus – which is particularly remarkable in a society characterised by polarised politics between unionists and Basque nationalists and the disturbing decades-long presence of terrorism. The dissolution of the terrorist group ETA 10 years ago is seen by many as a factor facilitating the increasing levels of unity and consensus among the Basque political class. This translates into higher levels of policy stability: government turnover as a result of changing political majorities does not imply disruption in policies, but rather continuity. Likewise, opposition parties tend to support a large proportion of the governments' legislative initiatives in the regional parliament.

In contrast to the current Basque political pragmatism, Catalonia is seen as a highly polarised arena. The region is sharply divided into two political blocks: pro-independence and unionist. And the 2017 political push for Catalan secession is, in the view of experts closer to the unionist side, a major reason for discrediting regional institutions in the eyes of the population. Conversely, for those supporting the independence bid, governance in Catalonia has suffered as a result of the 'brutal' response of the Spanish government that, in their view, slowed down policymaking and increased red tape. Nevertheless, a feeling shared among many in Catalonia is that the regional government had prioritised the attempt at secession over governance and management. Similarly, in Lubelskie the opinions of experts are highly divided along political positions. For instance, while some argue forcefully that there are no threats to freedom of the press in Lubelskie, others believe that there are pressures in this area from national and local governments; and, all in all, most consider that information is not reliable and that media outlets have incentives to conceal relevant news.

These intangible or 'soft' factors do seem to matter more than particular institutions for strengthening quality of government. And yet one institutional factor seems key, at least for the Spanish regions: the level of politicisation of managerial positions in the administration. There seems to be a higher proportion of politically appointed top managers in the Catalan public sector than in the Basque equivalent. Likewise, in Lubelskie experts concur: political and personal connections do seem to matter more than skills and professional experience when it comes to being appointed to a top managerial position in public sector organisations. Other institutional factors, such as transparency requirements, have also been noted as relevant by experts. The increasing availability of open administrative data is seen, particularly in the case of both Spanish regions, as fundamental to providing high quality of government.

Having said this, the existence of certain institutions – from codes of good conduct and administrative procedures to the existence of ad hoc anti-corruption bodies – is seen in Lubelskei and Catalonia as sometimes superfluous or, in some cases, even detrimental to quality of government. In Lubelskei, specific institutions, such as the Supreme Audit Office, the Internal Security Agency or the Central Bureau of Investigation, can be potentially helpful, but

often times they are seen as manipulable by the authorities. In Catalonia, some experts noted the 'dark side' of some regulatory changes designed to foster quality of government. The administrative procedures that theoretically protect administrations from fraud and corruption can delay administrative activity and may actually increase red tape. Fear of punishment leads many public officials to paralysis, which, in turn, hampers public sector innovation.

12 Sub-national Quality of Government in the EU A qualitative study of two Spanish regions: Catalonia and the Basque country

[21]

12.1 Executive Summary

- In terms of quality of government, Spain is a fairly stable, average case within the EU. However, this masks significant within-country variation that is growing over time.
- This report focuses on the highest and lowest ranked regions, the Basque Country and Catalonia, respectively.
- Paradoxically, the Basque Country and Catalonia share several key similarities. Both regions were early industrialisers, are richer than average, have important urban centres, have their own language in addition to Spanish, and the regional governments are responsible for the three services that the EQI study focuses on: education, health, and policing.
- The methodology used is that of in-depth interviews with stakeholders that have good knowledge of the working of public administration in the regions. 27 interviews were conducted.
- There is wide agreement among experts in the Basque Country that the high EQI score reflects the realities of the situation. In Catalonia, by contrast, experts are sharply divided.
- Many experts attribute the divergence in EQI scores to differences in the political dynamic of both regions: consensus in the Basque Country and contentious polarisation in Catalonia. The difference in the funding model for the Catalan and Basque governments is a centrepiece in most accounts given by Catalan participants. They argue that the Basque institutions have many more fiscal resources to fund public services. Basque participants, on the other hand, argue that the reason for their increased wealth is their management culture.
- The political appointment of managerial level positions is also discussed as a reason for poorer government outcomes, although there is no agreement among experts about this. The same applies to the abundance of administrative positions filled with personnel with temporary contracts.
- Transparency in the public administrations of both regions has increased, but experts consider that this has not improved the EQI scores and that the new rules impose cumbersome red tape that produces paralysis and stifles innovation.
- In terms of corruption, most experts say that this has affected Catalonia more so than the Basque Country. However, several Catalan participants argue that the perception of high corruption in Catalonia reflects the lower tolerance of Catalans towards it compared to citizens in other Spanish regions.
- Culture plays a prominent role in accounts of the high/low EQI scores in both regions. Several Catalan participants emphasised that the perception of poor quality of public services stems from the higher standards that Catalans have. Culture, interviewees say, plays a different role in the Basque Country. They argue that the small size of the region and its relative homogeneity favours social control and accountability. The strength and density of civil society also contributes to high interpersonal trust levels and to higher responsiveness to social interests.

[21] Author: Pablo Fernández-Vázquez, Carlos III University, Madrid. Lead coordinator from UGOT is Victor Lapuente

12.2 Introduction

Spain is a very intriguing case through which to study the determinants of regional quality of government. On the one hand, the median EQI level for the 17 Spanish regions is -0.1, a value that is fairly close to the overall mean of zero for all regions in the EU-27 countries. Over time, the median level of quality of government has not changed substantially: it was 0.2 in 2010, 0.18 in 2013, -0.13 in 2017, and now -0.1. In other words, the median region in Spain is located near the center of the overall distribution in every round of the EQI study.

From this point of view, Spain would appear as an 'average' case of quality of government in the European context. However, the median Spanish regional EQI does hide a substantial level of cross-regional variation in quality of government. This is shown in Figure 1, which presents the percentile of each Spanish region within the entire sample of EU-27 regions. The within-country variation is remarkable. Some Spanish regions are among the best performers in Europe. The Basque Country (ES21), the highest ranked region within Spain, is in the group of the top 25% of regions. Indeed, its EQI level is comparable to most Austrian or German regions, and it is even above länder like Hamburg (DE60) or Upper Austria (AT31). The same could be said of Spanish regions like La Rioja (ES22) or Navarra (ES23).

In stark contrast, regions like the Canary Islands (ES70), Andalusia (ES61), or Catalonia (ES51) lie in the bottom third of the EU-27 distribution of quality of government index. Catalonia, the lowest-ranked region in Spain, has an EQI index value that is very close to those of several Polish and Italian regions such as Malopolskie (PL21) or Umbria (ITI2). In sum, it is not appropriate to characterise Spain with a single indicator of quality of government. Within its borders we can find regions ranked among the best in Europe and others that are among the worst ranked according to the EQI index. Incidentally, this heterogeneity helps justify why a regional-level measure of quality of government is necessary, since a national one may mask too much variation within it.

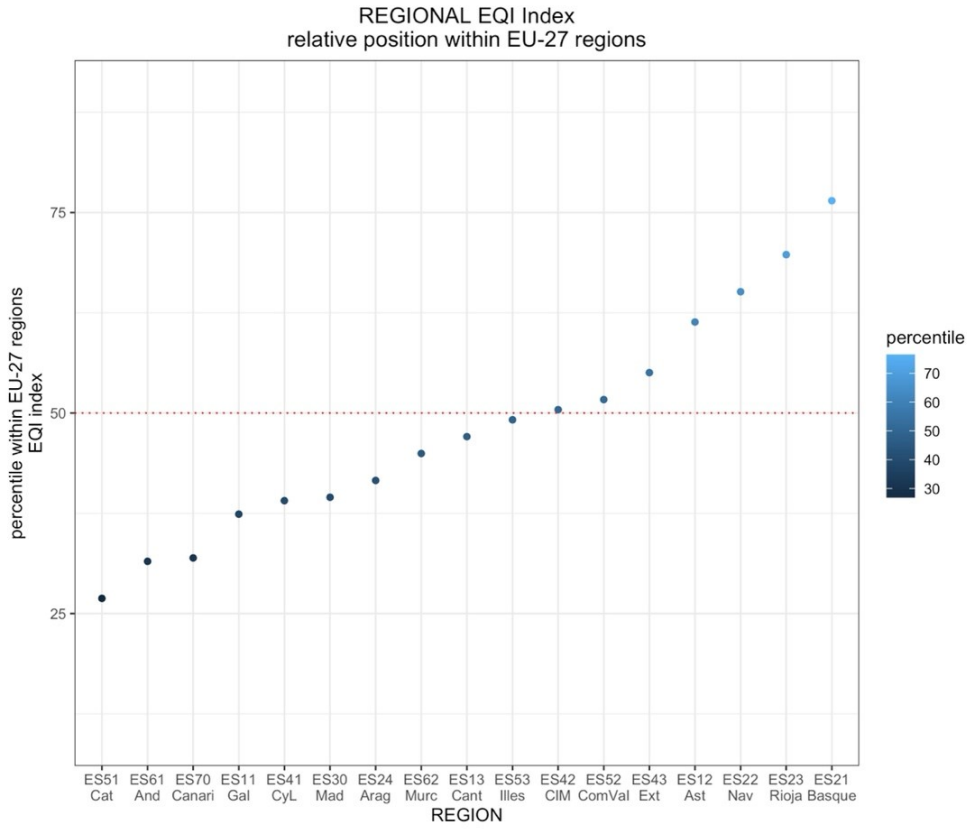
Cross-regional heterogeneity in quality of government estimates is not something new in the Spanish context, although divergence between regions has been rising over time. Figure 2, which is borrowed from Charron, Lapuente, and Bauhr, 2021, presents the regional EQI estimates for all 17 Spanish regions over the four rounds of the regional Quality of Government study. As can be seen, within-country heterogeneity has been on the rise in Spain, particularly from the second round onwards[22]. The better-performing regions such as the Basque Country, Asturias, or Navarra have improved their EQI values over time. At the same time, the regions with poorer performance, such as Andalusia and Catalonia, have dropped in the quality of government indicators.

Figure 3 summarises the descriptive analysis of the performance of the Spanish regions in the latest EQI study. The figure presents the within-country distribution of regional EQI scores for all EU countries with more than one region. It does so with a boxplot, wherein the horizontal line inside the 'box' reflects the median and the bottom and top limits of the box indicate the 1st and 3rd quartiles. The vertical lines indicate the maximum and the minimum of the distribution (unless there are outliers, in which case they are represented by dots). Countries in Figure 3 are ordered according to the regional median EQI value, from lowest to highest. Spain's data is highlighted in red.

This figure reflects how the median Spanish region is located close to the (standardised) European average of zero. At the same time, the within-country variation in Spain is considerable: the spread of the 'box' and the distance between the top and the bottom of the vertical line is higher than that of most other European countries, with the exception of Italy. Indeed, the standard deviation of regional EQI scores in Spain (0.52) is the second largest of all studies, only behind Italy (0.59).

[22]The standard deviation of regional quality of government in Spain has grown monotonically. It was 0.24 in 2010, 0.28 in 2013, 0.42 in 2017, and now it has reached 0.5.

Figure 1: **Regional EQI: Relative Position of Spanish Regions within the EU**



Note:The position of Spanish regions within the overall distribution of regional EQI in the EU-27, 2021 round. Dots represent the percentile of each region. Higher percentiles indicate that the region has a higher EQI value.

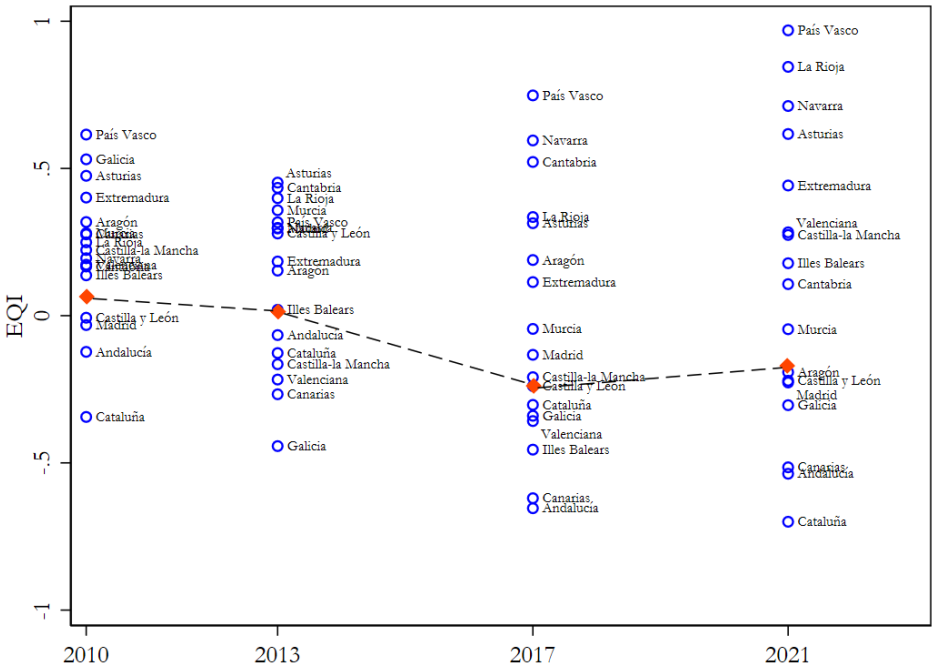
12.3 Case selection and Methodology

This report presents an in-depth study of the two Spanish regions with the highest and the lowest EQI score. These regions are the Basque Country (ES21) and Catalonia (ES51), respectively. Focusing on the two extreme cases of measured quality of government is particularly fitting given the high variation in regional EQI in Spain and how it has grown steadily over time across the four rounds already completed.

The methodology employed is qualitative. The report relies on in-depth interviews with active politicians, public administrators, and representatives of business, academia, and civil society from both regions. In total, 27 interviews were conducted (see Appendix). Interviewees were first provided with information about the results of the study in each of their regions. They were then prompted to provide their overall reaction to the score obtained by the region, considering whether they largely agreed with it or not, and why this was the case. Lastly, participants were asked to discuss in more detail the reasons that could explain the high (or low) performance of the administrations – local, regional, national – operating within their region.

The experts recruited expressed three types of reactions regarding the EQI scores obtained by the Basque Country and Catalonia in the last round. The first type of reaction was that of surprise at the vast difference in perceived quality of government between both regions. As one interviewee expressed it: 'I am surprised because, on paper, Catalonia and us [The Basque Country] are similar. We see each other as leaders within Spain and we tend to look outside of Spain for models. I.e. our model is Norway rather than Andalusia.' This reaction responds, at least partially, to the fact that both regions were the early industrialisers in Spain, have been magnets for domestic labour

Figure 2: **Regional Variation in Spain Over Time**



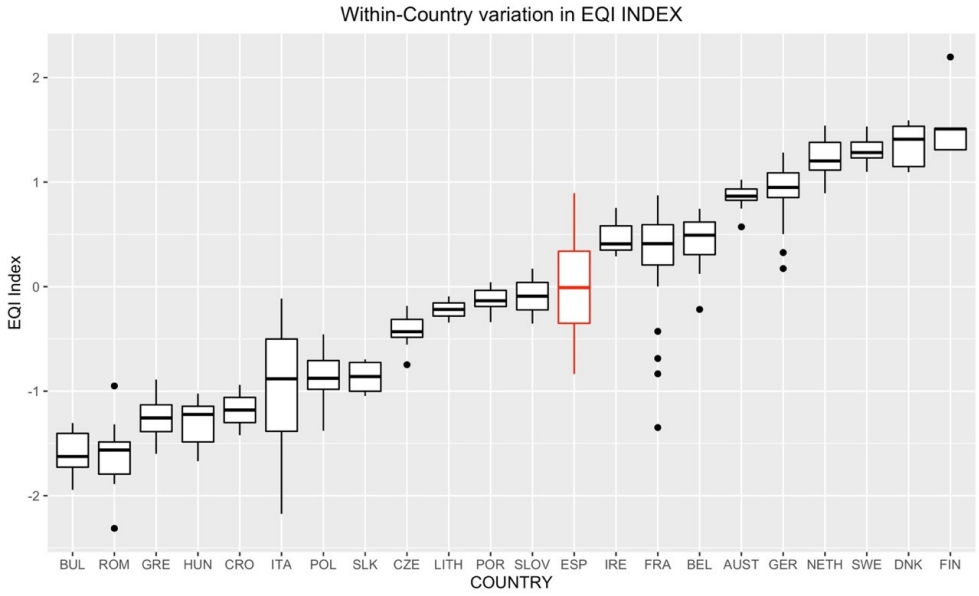
Note:The EQI index value for all 17 Spanish regions over the four rounds of the Study. The region-specific indicator and the region's name are in blue. Source: Charron, Lapuente, and Bauhr (2021).

migration for many decades, and even today rank high in terms of GDP per capita. Specifically, according to the latest data – from 2019 – the Basque Country ranks 2nd and Catalonia ranks 4th in regional per capita GDP[23]. This sense of surprise was not shared by all participants, however. Some expressed the belief that the difference between Catalonia and the Basque Country was due in part to differences in population size. A participant indicated: 'Size matters for the quality of government. Smaller regions tend to be ranked better than larger ones. [On top of it] the Basque Country is a very homogeneous society whereas Catalonia is much more diverse.'

The second type of reaction relates to the EQI score for the Basque Country. There was an almost unanimous consensus among participants from the Basque Country that this region's high EQI score reflected reality. As a participant candidly stated: 'In the Basque Country we have a good life.[24]' Another person declared: 'In the Basque Country there is an outstanding quality of life.[25]' A third interviewee, coming from the business world, indicated: 'I am not surprised; there is a general perception that public services here are very good. It's a feeling you encounter in the street.' Along the same lines, another participant said: 'The education, health, and police services are truly good. It's not just perceptions. It's reality.' One of the participants gave a very concrete example: 'The average waiting time for a doctor in the Basque Country is much shorter than in other Spanish regions like Andalusia or Murcia. The news was on the radio this morning.' The third reaction concerns the score obtained by Catalonia. In contrast to the opinions gathered in the Basque Country, participants in Catalonia were sharply divided in their evaluation of their region's EQI estimate. On the one hand, a group of interviewees argued that the score did not reflect the reality of Catalonia. A top official in the regional government declared: 'The score reflects more perceptions than realities.' A bureaucrat in a provincial administration agreed: 'The quality of the public services is not actually that much worse than that of the Basque country.' Elite civil servants in a public agency declared: 'The measurement instrument is problematic, because it focuses on perceptions rather than on realities.'

[23]Source: https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/1087914/pib-per-capita-por-comunidades-autonomas/
[24]In Spanish: 'En el País Vasco vivimos muy bien.'
[25]In Spanish: 'En el País Vasco se vive de la repera.'

Figure 3: **Regional Variation in Spain: 2021**



Note: Within-country variation in the EQI index, 2021 round, Boxplot. The horizontal line inside the 'box' indicates the median in the distribution, the bottom and top borders of the box reflect the 1st and 3rd quartiles, respectively. Sample: only regions with >1 region

On the other hand, another similarly sized group of Catalan participants expressed their agreement with the score as well as their lack of surprise. 'The map [with the regions in colours according to their score] did not surprise me at all. I am very critical. Back in the day, Catalonia was a model for other regions, now it's not', said a top bureaucrat. Another person declared: 'I am not surprised. It's the procés [the bid for independence by the regional government backed by part of Catalan society] stupid. It has deeply divided society and made everyone frustrated.' Lastly, another one said: 'I am not surprised. The regional administration was not built to promote good governance, but to promote nation-building. And it shows.'

This divergence of point of view among participants in Catalonia is a theme that emerges repeatedly – almost as a leit motiv – in the remainder of the report because opinions in this region are deeply divided.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. The next section briefly describes the main structural characteristics of the two regions that we study. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the factors that could contribute to the quality of government in each region. This analysis zeroes in on several dimensions that might account for differences in the perceived quality of government: (1) contextual factors, (2) the political dynamic, (3) the functioning of public administrations, (4) the role of the media and the judiciary, and (5) culture and civil society. Lastly, the report concludes with a discussion of take-away lessons that can be drawn from the results of the study.

12.4 Description of the history and structural characteristics of both regions

Historical background

Catalonia and the Basque Country are both northern regions in Spain. They distinguish themselves from other regions in that they were two of the earlier industrialisers in the country, starting in the late 19th century (2003). The Basque Country's industry specialised in coal, steel production, and shipbuilding, whereas in Catalonia the textile industry was prominent. Another key element that is distinctive is that both have regional languages, basque and catalan. Specifically, part of the population in both regions (albeit less than half) has these regional languages as their mother tongue. Speakers of these languages are largely bilingual in that they are also fluent in Spanish. Catalans and Basques who have Spanish as their native language are less bilingual, although the levels of bilingualism in these groups has been rising due to the education system in both regions, which strongly promotes the learning of the regional language.

As a result of the combination of industrialisation and having their own language, regionalist and nationalist movements arose in the late XIXth and early XXth centuries. Their influence led to the creation of regional governments with devolved powers in the 1930s, during the democratic experience of the Spanish second Republic. In part due to the presence of strong nationalist movements and the previous historical experience with regional decentralisation, the Basque Country and Catalonia – in that order – were the first two regions to access regional autonomy following the passing of the 1978 Spanish Constitution.

Structural conditions

Catalonia is significantly larger than the Basque Country, both in geographical area and in population. Catalonia comprises over 32,000 square kilometers, which represents around 6% of Spanish territory. By contrast, the Basque Country only occupies about 7,000 square kilometers, hence 1/5 of the size of Catalonia. In terms of population, the difference is also notable. The population of the Basque Country hovers slightly above 2 million, whereas that of Catalonia is close to 8 million. The population of the Basque Country is thus only 1/4 of that residing in Catalonia. The difference in ratios indicates, at the same time, that population density is somewhat higher in the Basque case than in the Catalan one.

Economically, both regions are richer than the Spanish average and have been so for many decades. Table 1 below presents the trend in the per capita GDP of both regions, using the Spanish average as a benchmark. As can be seen, both regions have a higher GDP per capita than Spain as a whole, and this is fairly constant over the 2010-2019 period.

Table 2 deepens this analysis by looking at the weight of each regional economy in the Spanish total. Even though the Basque Country is richer than Catalonia (in per capita terms), its weight in the Spanish economy is much smaller than Catalonia's, barely 1/3 of it. This is due to the fact that the Basque Country is significantly smaller in population.

Table 19: **Per Capita GDP in both Catalonia and the Basque Country, in euros. Spain's average is used as the benchmark, period 2010-2019.**

	2010		2013		2017		2019	
	Euros	%	Euros	%	Euros	%	Euros	%
Basque Country	29,655	128.7	28,387	129.6	32,136	128.7	34,142	129.2
Catalonia	27,192	117.1	25,945	117.9	29,727	119.1	31,119	117.8
Spain	23,215	100	22,014	100	24,969	100	26,426	100

Source: National Statistics Institute (INE)

Table 2: Weight of regional economies in the Spanish total – 2010-2019

Region	2010	2013	2017	2019
Basque Country	6%	6%	6%	6%
Catalonia	18.8%	18.8%	19.1%	19%

The following two graphs (Figure 4 and Figure 5) present the composition of the Catalan and the Basque economies, respectively. As can be seen, both are regions in which the primary sector has a tiny weight (1% or less), whereas industry and the service sector are much more relevant. Manufacturing is particularly important for the Basque country, whereas trade and transportation is crucial for the Catalan economy. The weight of the public administration – social security, health, education, social services – is somewhat higher in the Basque country than in Catalonia.

Figure 4: **Composition of the Catalan Economy, data for 2019. Source: National Statistics Institute (INE)**

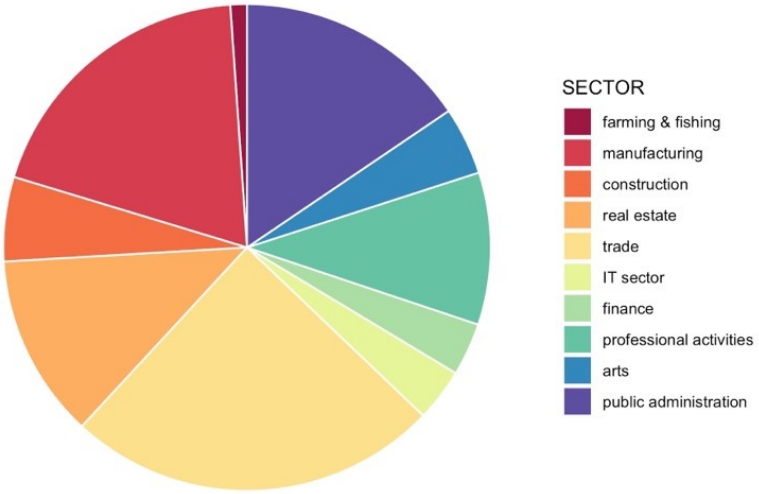
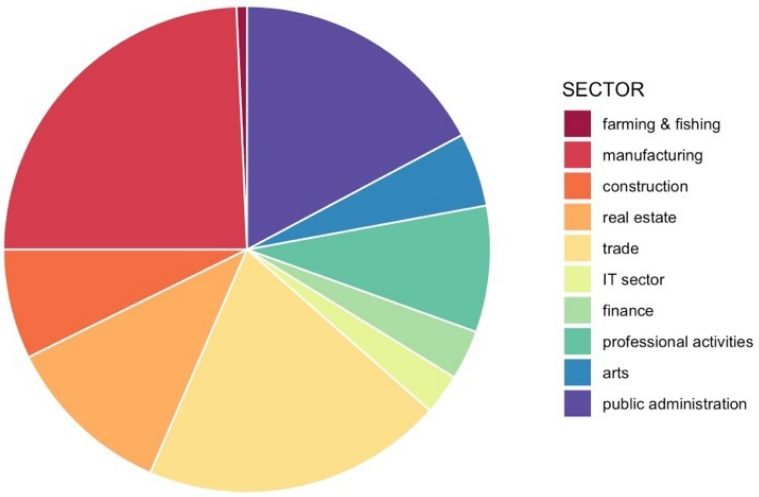


Figure 5: **Composition of the Basque Economy, data for 2019. Source: National Statistics Institute (INE)**



Regional autonomy and funding

Catalonia and the Basque Country have similar levels of regional powers. This similarity is particularly relevant when it comes to the three key services that the EQI focuses on: health provision, education, and public safety. In this regard, the regional governments of Catalonia and the Basque Country have full control over the public health service in the region. The only key aspect that is decided at the national level is the minimum list of services that citizens have the right to without having to pay. Regions can, however, choose to top this up by adding services that are not covered under public insurance in other parts of the country.

A similar logic applies to education. The central government sets basic standards regarding the regulation of public and charter schools, and it sets mandatory basic guidelines for the curricula in primary and secondary education. However, management of the education service, its human resources, pay levels, and (partly) the content of the curriculum are fully in the hands of the Catalan and Basque governments.

In terms of public safety, Catalonia and the Basque Country are the only two regions with their own police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra in the former region and the Ertzaintza in the latter. The Spanish national police and the Guardia Civil are still present in both regions, although, for most intents and purposes, their presence is largely residual in both cases. In that sense, day-to-day policing and responsibility for addressing most types of crime is in the hands of the regional police forces[26].

Where Catalonia and the Basque Country diverge most is in their regional funding model. The Basque Country has full fiscal autonomy. Through the policy of concierto foral, the three Basque provinces have their own tax collection agency that is responsible for collecting all taxes. The Basque Country transfers a negotiated quantity to the Spanish central government, the cupo, to fund the general services that the Spanish government provides in the Basque Country. Crucially, nonetheless, the Basque Country's fiscal revenue does not contribute to fund services in any other region. In other words, there are no net fiscal transfers from the Basque Country to poorer regions within Spain.

[26]The Spanish 'Guardia Civil' is equivalent to the French Gendarmerie or the Italian Carabinieri corps.

Catalonia, by contrast, is part of the general regional funding system. In this region, taxes are collected by the Spanish tax collection agency (the Agencia Tributaria). The regional government has some capacity to set income tax rates, but only within some bounds. From the total tax revenue raised in Catalonia, part of it is transferred to the Catalan regional government as well as to local governments located in this region. Another part of it is used to fund the services provided by the Spanish government in Catalonia, such as social security administration. Lastly, part of the revenue is transferred to help fund public services in poorer regions. Catalonia, in sum, is one of the few regions that is a net contributor to the funding of public services in Spain.

12.5 Comparative Analysis

12.5.1 Institutions: Politics and Political Parties

Nearly every expert interviewed highlighted how the political system in the region was central to explaining the score obtained in the study. The political dynamic depicted by experts was one of **wide consensus** in the Basque Country and **polarisation and entrenched division** in Catalonia.

A key aspect that is emphasised by several Basque Country-based experts is that the politics of this region is now dominated by consensus. The current regional government – as well as key provincial authorities and large municipalities – are ruled by a coalition between the two main parties that represent two key constituencies of Basque society, the nationalists and the unionists. These parties are the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and the Basque Socialist Party (PSE). According to a former top bureaucrat, this coalition 'contributes to create a collaborative culture that focuses on the pragmatic management of the region, rather than on maximalist goals. There is no ideology that is being imposed. This helps pacify the society and sends the signal that the relationship with the central government will be fruitful. As a result, the demands that are placed on the central government are reasonable, which lowers polarisation. This is something that the Basque society is rewarding after many years of terrorism and more polarised politics'.

Along the same lines, another expert stated that the last 15 years have witnessed the end of polarized, block-based politics in the Basque Country. The cleavage between nationalist vs unionist Basques is less salient now. 'The time of radical and high-stakes politics is over in the Basque Country. The business world does not want it. It wants stability.'

What has contributed to the de-polarisation of Basque politics? Here experts largely agree as well. The dissolution of the Basque terrorist group E.T.A. is the main factor. As a consulting expert declared: 'There is a widely-shared optimism in the Basque Country following the end of E.T.A. That optimism percolates perceptions of the quality of government. It has also contributed to the end of polarised politics.' As a socialist councillor also stated: 'After the end of terrorism, there is a strong desire in the Basque society to turn the page. We now demand unity and consensus.'

Consensus politics, the experts say, goes beyond the coalition between the Basque Nationalist Party and the Socialists. Several experts pointed out that several parties have at different times in the last decade been in charge of the main political institutions of the Basque Country – regional government, provincial governments, and large municipalities – and yet policies have remained largely stable[27].As an expert said: 'Regional ministries have changed hands between parties, and so have municipalities and provinces, and yet everything has carried on working smoothly. Government turnover does not produce a public policy reset. Improvements are introduced gradually, unlike in Spain's

[27]All major Basque parties have at some point managed either the regional government, a province, or a provincial capital. This includes the Basque Nationalist Party, the Socialist Party, Bildu – a left nationalist party close to E.T.A, and the Spanish Popular party.

central government, where new major laws are introduced with every new cabinet.'

The complex institutional setup of the Basque Country is also mentioned as a factor that contributes to consensus. The regional government is responsible for funding and managing the health, education, and police services, among others. But resources come from the provinces, which manage the tax collection agencies – haciendas forales – and then transfer the resources to the regional government and municipalities. These provinces are also in charge of transport and infrastructure. As a top official indicated: "There is a need for collaborative governance, both between parties and between levels of government. The need to work together for the common good". As an example of collaboration and consensus, this expert indicated how 1/2 of all regional parliamentary initiatives had support from parties that are not in the regional cabinet."

The picture that emerges in Catalonia is drastically different. It is one of entrenched political blocks, namely the pro-independence camp and the unionist one. A political system, in sum, that is polarised. Several Catalan experts, particularly those not sympathetic towards the pro-independence bid, argue that the polarised dynamic is one of the main culprits for the low EQI scores obtained by Catalonia. They also tend to blame the pro-independence camp for having fueled polarisation with its bid for independence.

Experts that are critical of the pro-independence movement suggest that the political push for secession – named El procés – has negatively affected both **perceptions** about the quality of government and the underlying **realities**. In terms of perceptions, a top bureaucrat in a Catalan administration declared that: 'The procés has discredited the regional institutions. On the one hand, the pro-independence camp sees that the autonomous institutions are insufficient and problematic. On the other, the unionist side has come to see the institutions (which are controlled by pro-independence parties) as sectarian.' Using a similar argument, a second expert indicated that the independence bid has "lowered trust in the regional government". Even an expert that is closer to the pro-independence parties stated that: "The pro-independence bid has created the sensation among the public that the regional government has not focused on governance and management."[28] Some opinions also point to the fact that the pro-independence bid has negatively affected the quality of government. A top bureaucrat in an administration stated that: 'With the procés, the regional government has paid little attention to the actual management of day-to-day problems in favour of the more epic goal of achieving independence.' A retired local administrator highlighted that: 'There has been an absence of pragmatic politics. Much has been left undone for many years. For instance, the unified plan for infrastructure and service provision, which is a responsibility of the regional government, has not been approved for a long time. Regional public employees are still owed wages from 2014. . . .' All this can be summarised in the opinion shared by another expert. She declared: 'We have gone through 10 years of a standstill that has deeply affected public policies. The procés has concentrated all political energies and there has been no actual government. This has even percolated all the way down to local governments. Even parts of the regional budget have been left unspent because of the lack of diligence and attention of the government.'

Other experts, those more favourable towards independence, have a very different outlook on the repercussions of the pro-independence movement. They do not tend to mention the polarisation of society or lack of attention towards public policymaking. Instead, the focus here has been on the harmful role of the central government's response to the independence referendum. As an expert declared: 'The response of the Spanish government was brutal. The activation of article 155 in the Constitution was traumatic for the regional administration, and particularly for its employees. It also increased red tape and thus slowed down policymaking. It even affected contractors.'

[28] In Spanish: 'Se ha generado la sensación de que no se gestiona.'

12.5.2 Institutions: Regional Funding

The issue of regional funding emerged in almost all interviews with experts, particularly among those based in Catalonia. At issue here is the role played by the different funding systems that Catalonia and the Basque Country enjoy. As described above, whereas some of the fiscal revenue raised in Catalonia is used to fund public spending in other regions in Spain, that is not the case for the Basque Country. For several experts in Catalonia this is a key factor that explains the lower quality of public services relative to the Basque Country. A top official declared: 'We receive insufficient funding from the central government. This is particularly acute in terms of gaps in the execution of promised investments.' This sense of poor and unfair treatment from the central government is shared by many other experts. 'We receive less than we produce. There is no ordinality in investments. And even the limited investments that are promised are not completed, said another expert. This same idea was expressed by a handful of other interviewees. The conclusion they reach is that 'this poor regional funding system contributes to the poor perception of the quality of public services'. A person who has worked in both the Basque Country and Catalonia said: 'The Basque funding makes a difference. Municipalities have a lot more money. Public employees have higher salaries. The regional government has more financial room to fund generous public services.'[29].

By contrast, the Basque Country is seen by many Catalan experts as privileged. One of the experts graphically expressed this: 'In the Basque Country they live off the fat of the land.[30]. Another said: 'The Basque Country is rich, and they manage all their fiscal resources.'

Several experts in the Basque Country rejected this idea of privilege. Two arguments were advanced. The first one was historical. They argued that in the early period of devolution Catalonia was offered the same system but rejected it. As one expert declared: 'Jordi Pujol did not want the Basque model of regional funding because it is one in which you are on your own. If revenues are low, the central government does come to the rescue.' A key argument raised by business people, bureaucrats, and third sector agents in the Basque Country is that their model of regional funding is very risky. If revenues are high, the money may be kept. But if fiscal revenues go down, this leads to much worse trouble than being part of the general system because there is no eligibility to receive solidarity from other regions. This, the experts say, has important implications for the functioning of the Basque regional government and local authorities: 'The concierto – the Basque funding system – is risky. It relies on good public management.' Another person said: 'Yes, the concierto is very important for us. But not so much because revenues are higher, but because in the Basque Country we know that we must pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We thus need good public management. This generates a more entrepreneurial and pragmatic culture – our quality of life is at stake. This creates incentives to have low levels of corruption and for tax evasion to be fought more decisively by the authorities.'

12.5.3 Institutions: Public Administration

This is an area that many experts focused on in their diagnosis of the problems of quality of government. One of the issues considered was the historical legacy of how regional administrations were built through decentralisation after 1978. In the case of Catalonia, some experts were very critical. One of them stated: 'During the first 23 years of regional autonomy (1980-2003), a new administration was built from scratch, but the philosophy that was followed was not one of ensuring an effective administration, but that of "nation-building". The shape the regional administration took was one that mimicked the party that led the regional government during those two decades,

[29]This expert notes, however, that: 'A funding system is not a sufficient condition for the high score of the Basque Country. La Rioja participates in the same system as Catalonia and yet has very good scores.'

[30]In Spanish: 'Los vascos nadan en la abundancia.'

Convergència i Unió. Many within the first cohorts of top managers and administrators were selected from social strata that were sympathetic to this party.' According to another expert, something similar occurred in the Basque Country during the 1980s, but this was somewhat corrected in the 1990s.

Another key dimension considered by experts is that of the selection of candidates for the top managerial positions in the administration. Regarding Catalonia, an expert indicated that: 'The proportion of top managers that are politically appointed is higher in Catalonia than in the Basque Country. In addition, there has been substantial turnover in these positions since 2003.' The problem of the politicisation of these top positions is also highlighted by a participant who stated: "Lots of appointments at the top administrative level are discretionary, and in several key agencies such as the Centre for Opinion Studies (CEO) or the School of Administration. In many of these cases, the appointees must be civil servants, but there is still quite a wide margin for political discretion. This has a demoralising effect for many public employees. And it weakens the capacity of administrations to develop long-term plans. In part, this stems from the fact that those appointed politically tend to have a conservative mindset: they do not want to risk innovating so that they have better chances of progressing in their careers.'

Other interviewees were not that critical about the system for appointing top level managers. A participant said: 'Yes, there is politically-induced turnover at the top. But that is normal. I do not think a fully autonomous managerial echelon would be good. They would have a lot of power and they would have neither legitimacy nor be subject to accountability.' Others, while critical of the system, indicated that it could not explain why Catalonia is the lowest ranked region: 'Politicisation of the managerial level is not specific to Catalonia. True, that level is colonised by parties, but the same happens in the rest of Spain.' Thinking of the local level, an expert said: 'The managerial level is very much controlled by political parties in all Spanish municipalities. What counts is political loyalty.'

Some participants in the Basque country indicated that politicisation was less of an issue in that region. An academic said: 'There are fewer positions appointed based on political loyalty.' Yet another said that: 'There is a two-way street between public managerial positions and positions in the private sector (and even to the third sector). There is thus less politicisation, and these people have a lot of social prestige.'

A problem shared by both regions according to most experts is the fact that a high proportion of public employees are interinos, i.e. many positions are filled by personnel that have temporary appointments whereas the position is meant to be filled by permanently appointed staff. As a participant highlighted: 'In the Basque Country there is a huge pool of people with temporary appointments. It's more than 50% in the higher echelons of the administration. At least the Basque Institute for Public Administration manages their selection with fairly impartial exams.'

A similar situation arises in Catalonia. As someone very familiar with this said: '40% of employees are temporary. This is a huge challenge, since European rules force us to take this down to no more than 8%. One of the participants provided an explanation for what is behind this problem: 'There have been very few calls for permanent positions, and not with enough periodicity. There have been 10 years with calls for entry exams for the cuerpo general. The lack of calls has been made up for with the opening of temporary positions.'

What are the consequences of this for the quality of government? Experts voice concerns, although they do not think it is a key factor. One expert said: 'The procedure to select interinos is not particularly opaque, but it recruits from a lower quality pool because calls for temporary positions are not as widely known by potential candidates.' A former elite bureaucrat in the Basque Country confirmed this: 'The profiles of people recruited on temporary contracts are not the best.'

It seems that the consequences might not be limited to the overall talent of public servants. Some experts fear that it has increased the politicisation of the administration. According to a participant: 'Temporary positions open

the door to favouritism and nepotism in hiring practices.' Another person was even more negative: 'Many of those selected for temporary positions in Catalonia have affinity with the parties that have been in power in the last ten years.'

Finally, another issue that is mentioned is whether language requirements can be detrimental to the hiring of talent for the regional and local administrations in these two regions. As mentioned above, both regions have their own languages in addition to Spanish, and both Spanish and Basque/Catalan are official in the region. An expert who is familiar with the situation in the Basque Country said that language requirements are a barrier to entry: 'Talent is lost, particularly in public universities.' Others were not critical: 'We really care about effective bilingualism in the Basque Country. It may deter some potential candidates, but it is still worth it. And knowledge of Basque is only an entry-requirement for positions that involve dealing directly with citizens. On top of that, the Basque regional government creates many opportunities for newcomers to learn Basque through institutions like Euskaltegi.'

In terms of transparency, experts in both regions highlighted the changes in the rules that administrations must abide by. The increasing availability of open administrative data was also emphasised by other participants. A top bureaucrat in Catalonia declared: 'A lot of progress has been made in Catalonia since the regional law of 2014. It was promoted by several parties in parliament. It is more ambitious and demanding than the national-level one. There are clear punishments for lack of compliance.' A counterpart in the Basque Country raised a similar point: 'We have a very ambitious regional transparency law. Information on all contracts above 500 euros can be accessed by the public, and this includes the identity of the person who signed the contract.' Another Basque official proudly said: 'We are pushing for open government. We want data to be open and for paperwork to be done digitally so it is more traceable and transparent. Our commitment shows in how the region has been selected to participate in the Open Government Partnership, together with 19 other regions in the world.'

Among some Catalan interviewees, however, there is bewilderment that the improvements in transparency are not reflected in the EQI score: 'There is a high level of compliance with the Catalan transparency law. That's why I am surprised that it's not improving the region's score.'

The improvements in transparency, according to several experts, have a dark side. The new rules, they say, are a source of red tape that slows everything down. A Catalan official said: 'There was strong internal resistance to the transparency law among civil servants. It increases their workload. This is a relevant issue since the increase in transparency requirements may discourage potential candidates from entering an administrative career. It's just too much responsibility and too much red tape.' A former municipal employee could not agree more: 'In Spain, we are latecomers to the question of administrative transparency. But now we may have gone overboard, with the zeal of the newly-converted. Rules are too cumbersome, particularly for smaller municipalities. The staff needed to comply with the rules is missing. Now there is paralysis among public employees. There is a fear of signing any document.'

A Catalan expert in public administration declared: 'Procedures are now a living hell. The fear of punishment is leading us to paralysis. There is a fear of signing forms. And this is stifling innovation.' Another participant concurred and was deeply alarmed about this: 'The regional transparency law, together with the new Spanish law on procurement is producing a true standstill in the administration. It takes a year to do a contract! It's an absolute blockade. These laws are overly founded upon the complete mistrust of civil servants. The red tape is so bad that I don't think Catalonia will be able to spend the European NextGen resources.'

12.5.4 Institutions: The Judiciary and Corruption

The role of the judiciary does not seem to play an important role for experts. Those that highlight it in their interviews tend to think that the judicial authorities do a good job. As a Catalan expert indicated: 'The judiciary does its job of fighting corruption. It has uncovered major cases. But this has created social unrest and shock.' The effective work of judges, the expert continued, has contributed to a sense that there is a lot of corruption in Catalonia. This positive view of the judiciary is not shared by a minority of experts. One participant in the Basque Country was very critical: 'Among judges located in the Basque Country, there is very little appetite to investigate sensitive cases. The top regional court [Tribunal Superior de Justicia] had on its deck the case of a corrupt judge and it chose to turn a blind eye.'

The question of corruption plays a prominent role for many experts in both Catalonia and the Basque Country. Corruption is blamed by many as one of the reasons why perceptions of quality of government are worse in Catalonia and the Basque Country.

In Catalonia many experts agree that there have been major corruption scandals and that this may have contributed to perceptions of corruption. Two experts on corruption in Catalonia indicated: 'In the Basque Country there have been fewer corruption scandals and these have affected central actors in the political system. In Catalonia, on the other hand, corruption has affected the hegemonic party [Convergencia I Unió].' A top official in Catalonia agreed: 'Corruption scandals have been very relevant, such as the Palau scandal and the Pujol one.'

There was some agreement that these well-publicised scandals may have damaged perceptions of impartiality and corruption in Catalonia, but several experts doubted whether corruption in this region is actually higher than in other places. A former manager of a Catalan institution indicated: 'Corruption in Catalonia is remarkable, but it is not higher than in regions like Valencia, Andalusia, or the Canary Islands.' A top bureaucrat in the regional government confirmed this view: 'I am very surprised by the very negative view of corruption in Catalonia. There has been more corruption in other regions such as Valencia or the Balearic Islands.'

Most Basque experts tend to say that corruption in this high score region is very much under control. A retired top bureaucrat indicated: 'There may be isolated cases of corruption in the Basque Country, but there is definitely no sense that the main party – The Basque Nationalist Party – is corrupt at its core. That increases the credibility of the institutions.' Another retired official said: 'There may be some corruption, but it is very limited. I have worked for many institutions and agencies and I haven't seen any impropriety. Even though there is frequent government turnover and new parties have checked the files, nothing dirty has ever been found. There are no skeletons in the closet.' This same expert was proud of the ethics code created in 2014 that applies to top-level political appointees. Violations of this code "imply the termination of the job. This sends a signal to all top political appointees".

This apparent consensus is broken by some (minority) participants. They say that corruption in the Basque Country is not detected, but that it exists. A person interviewed said that there is "omertá among contractors with public institutions due to lack of impartiality. They are scared that if they blow the whistle they'll be cut from access to future contracts'. A second expert went even further: 'There is a lot more corruption than people think. It's just hidden, hidden now because the Basque Nationalist Party currently controls all the key political institutions in the Basque Country. This leads to a "code of silence". There is a lot of clientelism, many people's livelihoods depend on public administrations. Hence, they do not make complaints.'

12.5.5 The Media

The role of the media does not appear prominently in interviews with participants. When it does, it plays a markedly different role among Catalan and Basque experts.

In Catalonia, several participants made the case that the media has contributed to create pessimistic perceptions about the quality of public services and the situation of Catalonia as a whole. As two participants indicated: 'There is a very diverse media landscape in Catalonia, and this has created a more critical and demanding citizenry. The Catalan regional TV program, Polònia, is a good example of this. It mocks all politicians very harshly, regardless of their party.' In addition to this, the experts continued: 'The central government has pushed an agenda in the Spanish media that accuses Catalan politicians of wrongdoing but has done so with fabricated evidence.' Along the same lines, an expert declared: 'The national TV stations have explicitly sought to artificially increase the salience of corruption in Catalonia.' This is related to the point raised above indicating that a proportion of experts in Catalonia were uneasy about the low EQI score and attributed it to perceptions rather than realities.

Another group of Catalan experts emphasised a different aspect of the role of the media. According to them, the media, and particularly the regional public TV station (TV3), have significantly contributed to polarisation. One person openly said: 'TV3 is unbearable now. It's tremendously slanted.' Another declared: 'The media have substantially contributed to polarisation. TV3 is now very sectarian, it's helping create identity-based bubbles.' The context behind these opinions is that the regional public TV – which broadcasts in Catalan – is now mostly watched only by the pro-independence part of society.

Experts in the Basque Country seldom considered the role of the media as prominent. However, when they did, there was disagreement. Top officials in the regional government considered that the media was not particularly friendly: 'The main media conglomerate in the region is not particularly friendly towards the government. It definitely is not pro-nationalism.' In any case, these officials indicated that: 'Official advertising was allocated to media outlets strictly in proportion to their market share.' A freelance journalist had a more cynical view of the media landscape in the Basque Country: 'There is a general crisis of the traditional business model. There are fewer and fewer investigative journalists and those that uncover things are pressured.' In terms of market structure, this person indicated that, among printed newspapers, 'one is controlled by the government party [Deia], another one is strongly nationalistic [Gara], and the main one is basically controlled by the major business interests [Correo]'.

12.5.6 Civil Society and Culture

Culture is one of the topics that participants in both regions refer to the most when explaining the rank obtained by their region.

In Catalonia, several participants made the case that the predominant culture in the region is a key factor behind the low EQI score. Specifically, their argument is that Catalans tend to be more demanding and have higher standards towards public services. This would explain why Catalans have negative perceptions of the quality of public services. The underlying reality is not worse than that of most other regions, they say, but the interpretation of it is more critical.

This quote from a participant is representative of this argument: 'The Catalan population has very high standards [es muy exigente]. We have higher standards than in other regions in Spain. This stems from a historical tradition of having a dense and well-organised civil society. The density of associations and non-profit foundations is much higher than in the rest of the country. This stronger civil society produces a stronger demand for good

outcomes and stronger demand for effective accountability.' Along these lines a top bureaucrat interviewed declared: 'We Catalans have historically had a liberal or even libertarian character and a strong civil society, and for this reason we tend to see governments and public services with suspicion. We have very high standards.'

Culture is also wielded as an argument to explain why perceptions of corruption may be high in Catalonia. A participant declared: 'In Catalonia there is a strong critical sense towards corruption. The scandal that affected Jordi Pujol [regional prime minister for >20 years] and his political party deeply affected and alarmed society. This effect was cross-cutting, i.e. it shocked both pro-independence and pro-union citizens. In other regions like Andalusia or Valencia there has been a more tolerant approach on corruption.' A similar opinion was raised by some participants with good knowledge of corruption in the region: 'Catalan society had a very strong reaction towards corruption scandals. We are a very demanding society, more so than in other territories. Perhaps in Valencia or in the Balearic Islands they have been more tolerant.'

These opinions are shared more frequently by interviewees who appear to be more sympathetic towards the pro-independence bid. However, a pro-unionist participant also concurred that; 'We Catalans are very self-critical', although his conclusion pointed in a different direction: 'We have thought of ourselves as the trailblasers [punta de lanza] in Spain, and now we see we are not at the top anymore. This is something that is creating a widely shared sense of pessimism.'

Culture also plays an important role in the accounts provided by experts in the Basque Country, albeit a role of a different kind. Culture in the context is wielded as an argument to explain why the quality of government is high, regardless of perceptions. A key argument that was highlighted by a good number of Basque participants is well represented by this quote from an interviewee: 'The Basque Country is small. We know each other. I could bump into the regional prime minister at the movie theater this evening. There is less social stratification.' Along these lines, another participant indicated how the close-knit character of society is a deterrent of corruption: 'We all know each other in the Basque Country. The social cost of being corrupt or of wasting public resources is very high. Indeed, we have very high standards vis-à-vis fraud: there is no presumption of innocence here.'

Along similar lines, a business person speaking about the ethos of the corporate world declared: 'Here we do not like those who want to make a quick buck. Those are caught fast. We, instead, promote steady and reasonable management. The Basque private sector is largely composed of industrialists, not entrepreneurs who want to make easy money. We value stability and step-by-step progress.' Similarly, an expert from the third sector indicated that: 'Basque society favours pragmatism in management. There is an ethic of constant work and progress, even if it is slow. Hence, if frowns upon those that get rich very fast.'

Two more aspects of culture are brought up in the interviews as factors that could contribute to the high perceived quality of government in the Basque Country. The first is the level of inter-personal trust: 'We are a small society with a high degree of interpersonal and interclass trust: in the same txoko [closed gastronomic society] you can find people from very different class backgrounds.' The second one is the close-knit nature of Basque civil society. It leads some participants to consider that this increases institutional responsiveness: 'Civil society is very well organised. There are plenty of organisations –many of them local – that lobby agencies and officials and often get their demands met. This clearly increases satisfaction with the functioning of institutions.'

12.6 Conclusions

The gap in EQI scores between Catalonia (ES51) and the Basque Country (ES21) is rather striking. These are two regions that share several key structural factors that could be associated with the quality of government: they

have higher than average GDP per capita, were early industrialisers, have high levels of urbanisation, can count on competitive public universities and wide access to public education, are multi-ethnic societies with their own language in addition to Spanish, and have important regional powers. Yet their performance in the EQI survey could not be more divergent: the score for Catalonia is -0.83 and that of the Basque Country 0.89. Given that these scores are standardised, the difference in scores amounts to about 1.7 standard deviations!

This remarkable gap raises important questions for future research, particularly regarding the relative importance of long-term factors versus short-term contextual changes on the score of a region. Several interviewees indicated that there were indeed differences in the underlying performance of the Basque Country and Catalonia, but that these real differences were magnified in citizens' perceptions because of short-term factors, such as government stability or political polarisation.

One of the key methodological challenges for future iterations of the EQI study may thus be to disentangle the extent to which citizens' perceptions reflect tangible and stable differences in government performance rather than a response to conjunctural considerations. Indeed, many participants in the Basque Country, and (some of) those located in Catalonia, were eager to indicate that recent political developments were a key factor behind the score received by their respective region. Granted, the political context can have important consequences on the actual levels of service quality, impartiality, and corruption, but it can also affect the public mood, and this can in turn colour perceptions about the quality of government. Future work should try to parse out the relative importance of short-term contextual factors versus underlying stable phenomena. This could be done, for example, with survey experiments that employ priming manipulations.

A promising application of this inquiry would be to examine the impact of political polarisation. One of the explanations offered to account for the mismatch between Catalonia and the Basque Country was that politics in the Basque Country is dominated by consensus while that of Catalonia is frayed by deep divisions. A very relevant question that ensues is to what extent political polarisation (or lack thereof) affects the measured quality of government in a durable way or whether its impact lasts only so long as polarisation survives. If Catalonia were to become less polarised now, would that be reflected immediately in the perceptions of citizens or would polarisation leave a long-term legacy on the quality of government?

Another intriguing question regards the role of government stability and the domination of regional politics by a single party. In both Catalonia and the Basque Country, regional politics have largely been dominated by a single party. In Catalonia, it has been Convergence and Union and its heirs (PdCat and now Junts per Catalonia) that have dominated. This party and its new incarnations have led the regional government for 33 years over the 40-year period between 1980 and 2020. Likewise, the Basque Nationalist Party has been in office in the region for the entire period since regional devolution, except for a three-year stint between 2009 and 2012. Despite this close similarity, the performance of both regions in the EQI study is widely different. This raises the questions: what is the effect of party hegemony on the quality of government services? Is the impact heterogeneous and conditional on third variables?

The last point relates to the role of economic crises. The over-time evolution in the EQI scores for Catalonia and the Basque Country show a steady increase for the Basque Country since 2013 and a saw-like shape for Catalonia (Figure 2). A plausible explanation advanced by some participants is that the Basque Country has improved its score (in part) because it navigated the Great Recession much better than Catalonia. Indeed, one of Catalonia's worst EQI performances occurred in the 2010 wave, in the middle of the recession, when unemployment was very high and both the central and regional governments were starting to implement substantial budget cuts. Thus, what is the effect of economic performance on the quality of government? Does it affect public services in the long run through budget cuts and the loss of human capital or does the crisis simply affect the public's mood in the short-term? These are essential questions, the answers to which may serve two purposes: (1) to improve our under-

standing of the determinants of the quality of government and (2) to enhance our interpretation of the underlying phenomena that the EQI captures.

12.7 Appendix for Spanish Study

Interview	Position	Region
Interview 1	public sector consultant	Catalonia & Basque Country
Interview 2	Top bureaucrat regional government	Catalonia
Interview 3	Top bureaucrat provincial administration	Catalonia
Interview 4	Top bureaucrat regional government	Catalonia
Interview 5	Elite civil servant Barcelona municipality	Catalonia
Interview 6	Public Administration scholar	Catalonia
Interview 7	Former municipal civil servant (not Barcelona)	Catalonia
Interview 8	Former administrator or major Cultural Centre	Catalonia
Interview 9	Director of public agency	Catalonia
Interview 10	Catalan anti-corruption agency	Catalonia
Interview 11	Catalan anti-corruption agency	Catalonia
Interview 12	Top bureaucrat provincial administration	Catalonia
Interview 13	Top bureaucrat regional government	Catalonia
Interview 14	Top bureaucrat regional government	Basque Country
Interview 15	Political scientist	Basque Country
Interview 16	Member of municipal council	Basque Country
Interview 17	Top bureaucrat regional government	Basque Country
Interview 18	Top bureaucrat regional government	Basque Country
Interview 19	Top bureaucrat regional government	Basque Country
Interview 20	Freelance journalist	Basque Country
Interview 21	Former civil servant	Basque Country
Interview 22	Former civil servant provincial (foral) administration	Basque Country
Interview 23	Top Bureaucrat regional government	Basque Country
Interview 24	Researcher and civil servant in the field of education	Basque Country
Interview 25	Business federation	Basque Country
Interview 26	Third sector organisation	Basque Country
Interview 27	Business association	Catalonia

13 Sub-national Quality of Government in the EU in the time of Covid-19 Polish case studies

[31]

13.1 Executive Summary

- The QoG performance of the Polish regions has been consistently between the high results of the northern and western EU member states and that of the southern and eastern states.
- This report presents the result of an in-depth analysis aimed at determining the factors that have shaped differences in perceptions of the quality of governance in two Polish regions that differ significantly in levels of 2021 EQI.
- In-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of different stakeholders and age groups. There were 27 respondents in Lubelskie and 24 in Opolskie, representing different areas of socio-economic life, as well as different professions and sectors.
- Introductory desk research showed the different history of the regions studied, differences in the structure of the economy and in the level of socio-economic development. The historical background and spheres of influence of different organisational cultures, traditions of international cooperation and labour migration are significantly different in the regions analysed, which translates into differences in organisation and regulation in public institutions.
- There are no differences in regional autonomy and funding as Poland is a unitary state.
- There are meaningful differences in the size and population of the regions – Opolskie being the smallest Polish region with the lowest number of citizens but a strong network of towns and cities; Lubelskie is bigger but significantly centralised, with a large centre of power and a network of rather small towns.
- The respondents confirmed the results of the EQI. As many as 75% of respondents in Opolskie and 26% of respondents in Lubelskie, noted that their institutions are better than elsewhere in Poland.
- From the institutions surveyed, nterviewees in Lubelskie expressed the highest confidence in the army. In Opolskie respondents highlighted relatively higher trust in administrative units but also in public services and entrepreneurs. Political parties and the media remain the institutions eliciting limited trust in both regions.
- In Lubelskie, public institutions are more focused on following rules and procedures, while in Opolskie they are focused on delivering concrete results. This is also connected to the predominant strategy for ensuring compliance with the rules by public services employees, which differs between the regions. In Lubelskie this is largely punitive, while in Opolskie the strategy is based on positive reinforcement.
- Respondents in both regions indicated an improvement in the quality of public institutions following Poland's accession to the EU, with the greatest positive changes recorded in the case of educational units, universities and schools. The violation of impartiality due to political and/or personal connections is much more visible in Lubelskie than in Opolskie. This was mainly manifested by differences in access to public positions through political or personal connections. In Lubelskie voivodship, 30% of respondents indicated a very high or high degree of partiality in the case of political connections and 37% in the case of personal connections. In Opolskie it was 12.5% and 8.3%, respectively.
- The competence of leaders and willingness to cooperate with other stakeholders presented by local and regional authorities are also important factors shaping the perception of the quality of governance. The organisational

[31] Authors are Paweł Chmieliński and Barbara Wieliczko from the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa, Poland. Lead coordinator from UGOT is Monika Bauhr.

culture in Opolskie, based on the principles of public consultation and participation, supported transparency and allowed for more autonomous actions by public institution employees.

- Inhabitants of both regions, but especially Opolskie, emphasised the importance of good structures, efficient organisation of work in offices, work ethos and competences of officials, as well as multiculturalism and contacts with other countries, as some of the basic factors for the quality of governance index. These features are linked to the historical development of the region, which in turn has had an impact on the infrastructure network, links between centres and their independence from the regional capital.
- Membership of the EU has introduced new institutional principles, based on participation and cooperation with NGOs and citizens, for planning and implementing regional policy. In general opinion, despite the bureaucracy (usually pointed to when criticising the use of Structural Funds), the legitimacy of planning, the high impact (through the size of the budget), and equal rules for access to support for beneficiaries are usually highlighted. This translates into a better perception of public institutions, the competence of their staff and the quality of regional policy.
- On the other hand, the survey shows that both the quality of planning and the way (and legitimacy) of spending EU funds, and thus their real effect in a given region, depended on the quality of the institutions, and the work ethos, openness and certain general values represented by a region's community. This was also demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the regional authorities performed relatively better in organising assistance to inhabitants and managing the crisis than those at the national level. On a regional level, however, it can be seen that Opolskie's institutions were rated higher, in this context, than thosein Lubelskie'.
- The results of the study confirm that historically shaped regional differences still have a significant influence on socio-economic development and quality of governance. The diverse historical pathways of the Polish regions had a strong impact on the level of social capital and these differences persist. This is related to the influence of eastern and western culture (including organisations) on each of the regions, but was also due to the degree of homogeneity of the region in terms of ethnicity and location-related contacts with other countries through family and work ties.
- Strengthening power in local centres, further decentralisation of funding opportunities (incl. EU cohesion policy), as well as the greater involvement of citizens in decision-making on development of the regions, can provide significant support to improving the quality of regional governance in Poland.

13.2 Introduction

13.2.1 Regional QoG performance in the country

The Polish regions' QoG performance has been consistently located between the high results of the northern and western EU member states and that of those in the south and east. Regional QoG in Poland improved according to each of the EQI surveys from 2010 to 2017. The results of the 2021 EQI survey show a deterioration from the previous results. The EQI results for the Polish regions are now slightly better overall than in 2010 (Tab. 1.1).

Table 1.1: List of Regions with Greatest Positive Change in EQI since 2017

Region	2010	2013	2017	2021
Dolnośląskie	-0.868	-0.852	-0.342	-0.77
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	-0.594	-0.235	-0.224	-0.689
Łódzkie	-0.803	-0.704	-0.059	-0.852
Lubelskie	-0.759	-0.611	-0.447	-1.089
Lubuskie	-0.845	-0.373	-0.568	-0.557
Małopolskie	-0.827	-0.496	-0.335	-0.714
Mazowiecki regionalny	-0.924	-0.748	-0.457	-0.748
Opolskie	-1.028	-0.199	-0.413	-0.340
Podkarpackie	-0.8	-0.722	-0.56	-0.711
Podlaskie	-0.889	-0.339	-0.392	-0.878
Pomorskie	-0.643	-0.364	-0.272	-0.489
Śląskie	-1.026	-0.848	-0.415	-0.557
Świętokrzyskie	-0.795	-0.655	-0.594	-0.783
Warminsko-Mazurskie	-0.883	-0.437	-0.265	-0.810
Warszawski stołeczny	-0.924	-0.748	-0.457	-1.229
Wielkopolskie	-0.928	-0.592	-0.402	-0.587
Zachodniopomorskie	-0.818	-0.478	-0.303	-0.888
Poland	-0.844	-0.553	-0.383	-0.746

Note: source: Charron, Lapuente, and Bauhr (2021)

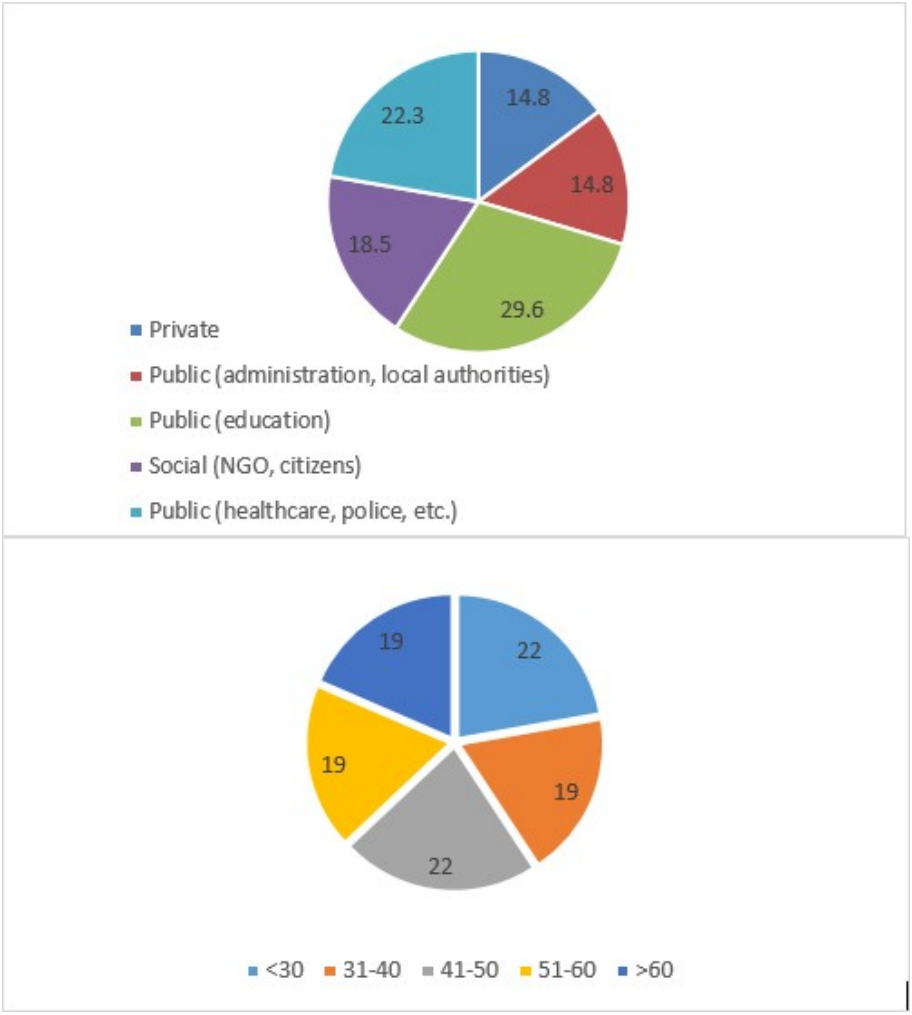
Polish regions, with their current borders and powers, were established in 1999 after the administrative reform that significantly changed the responsibilities and powers of the non-central authorities. In the period between 1975-1998 there were 49 regions (voivodships) in Poland. Since 1999 there have been only 16. For purposes of cohesion policy, due to diversity in socio-economic development, the biggest region – Mazowieckie was divided into two regions – Mazowieckie region and Mazowieckie capital city.

For in-depth analysis, two Polish regions have been chosen – Lubelskie (PL81) and Opolskie (PL52). The rationale for choosing Lubelskie region is because of its generally lower EQI than the Polish average, as well as a much larger fall in the value of this index between 2017 and 2021, while in the case of Opolskie, it is the fact that in the 2021 survey its EQI was the highest among the Polish regions.

13.2.2 The Research Method

The study was based on interviews with citizens in the case study regions – Lubelskie and Opolskie – representing different social groups. The interviews were based on a questionnaire that included open and closed questions.

Figure 1: **Sectoral and age structure of the participants of the Lubelskie case study**

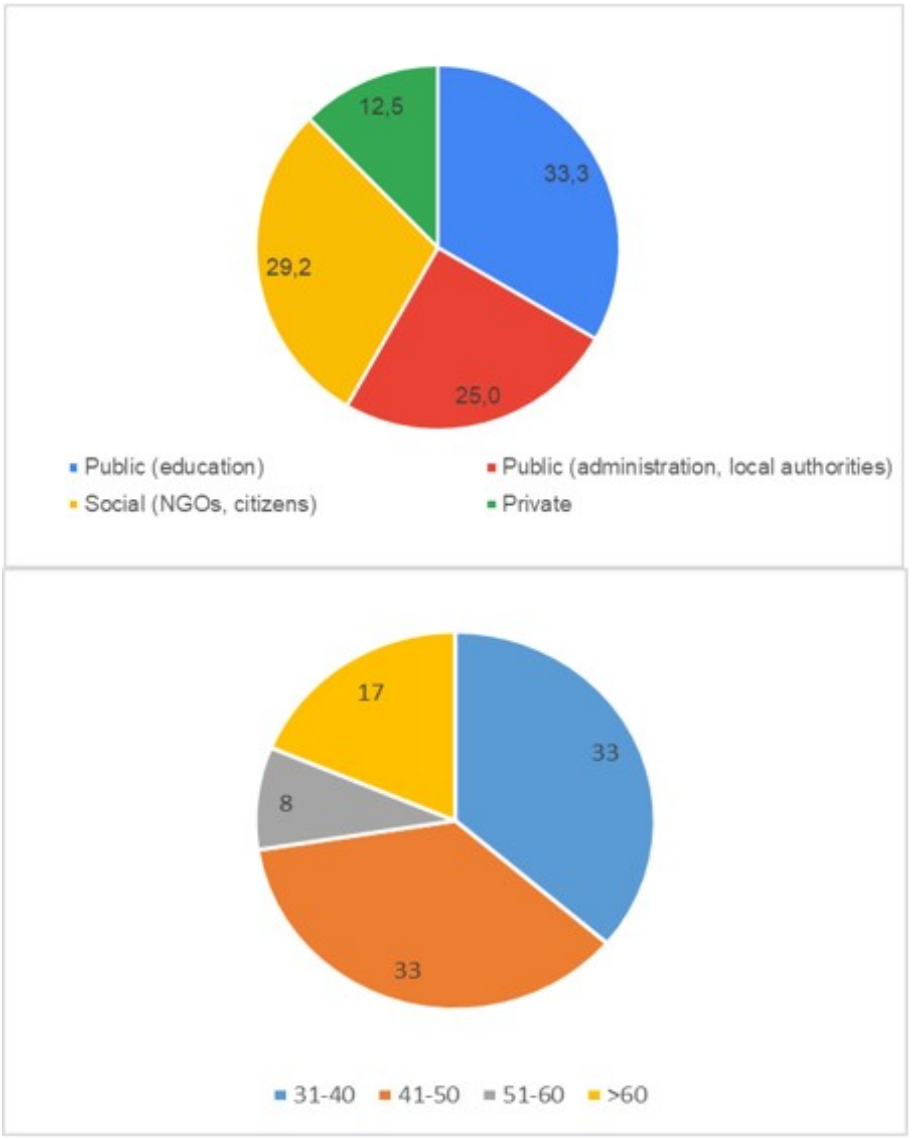


The interviewees were chosen to represent different stakeholder groups, but the sample is not representative of the whole population. Moreover, the choice of respondents was aimed at interviewing people who could respond to the diverse issues mentioned in the interview. Therefore, the shares of the respondents presenting different opinions are not representative of the whole population of the studied regions but of the groups interviewed. The premise of the study was to interview representatives of different sectors, primarily people representing professions that deal directly with institutions, as employees but also as users. Therefore, the study included representatives of local government, entrepreneurs, NGOs (including local action groups operating in rural areas), academics and teachers, students and residents.

The Lubelskie case study was based on individual interviews with 27 persons representing the private, public and social sectors and different age groups. The majority of participants were women – 55.6%. In Opolskie, 24 people were surveyed, of which 58.3% were women.

In both regions, a diverse representation of different sectors and fields of socio-economic life was ensured in order to provide adequate survey saturation. At the same time, selection was based on people who have regular

Figure 2: **Sectoral and age structure of the participants of the Opolskie case study**



contact with the public administration by virtue of their profession or activity. Thus, interviewees were able to make a relatively objective assessment of the region's functioning in the context of the subject of the study (Fig. 1, 2).

The introductory part of the study report – description of the regions – is based on a literature review and statistical data from Statistics Poland. The sections following compile the respective answers to the questions asked in a methodologically convergent manner in both regions. The sampling and uniform research approach allow for a comparative study.

13.2.3 Position of Lubelskie and Opolskie regions in the socio-economic landscape of Poland

The high degree of regional inequalities in Poland has historical roots dating back to the 19th century. Poland was divided between Prussia, Austro-Hungary and Russia[32]. The distinctive development conditions of these three territories have left deep traces that have manifested themselves in the level of economic growth, infrastructure networks (roads, railways), the level of urbanisation, the legal system, the level of education, the behaviour of the population and the cultural landscape (Chmieliński, 2006). These differences were not offset by the Second Polish Republic, especially as the modernisation efforts undertaken in the east were interrupted by the Second World War.

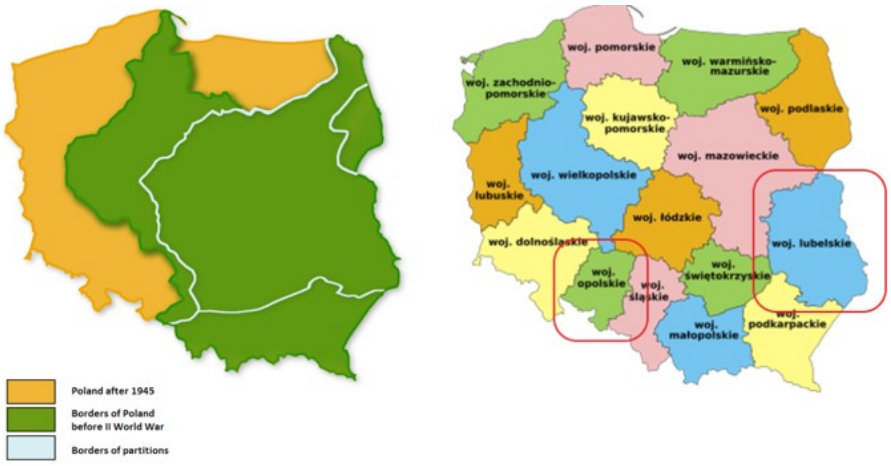
The nature of regional diversity is also rooted in the reforms that took place over almost 200 years of the turbulent history of Poland. Reforms giving peasants ownership of land were the beginning of the process of the transformation of agriculture from the feudal era and the emergence of a capitalist economy that led to changing the agrarian structure. These reforms took place during a more than 100-year period of partitions, during which individual parts of the country were incorporated into various state organisms. The effect was that these reforms were not only carried out in three different periods of the nineteenth century (appropriation took place over 50 years), but they also incorporated differences in the law of the three invader countries. The conditions for running a farm in various parts of Poland were thus under the agricultural laws of Prussia, Austria and Russia.

Also, the development and character of agriculture in the areas of a particular annexation was conditioned by the culture and model of agriculture prevailing in a given country. In the Prussian area, the appropriation was associated with agricultural concentration, and thus with the creation of a smaller number of farms operating on large areas of land (over 67% of agricultural land was concentrated in farms with an area of over 20 ha). In the other regions, the appropriation of land to peasants did not bring any changes in the agrarian structure, which was characterised by agrarian fragmentation and overpopulation (Chmieliński, 2006). In the Austrian part of Poland, the land use status was characterised by a mosaic of small plots of land; while in the Russian part a polar structure began to form: on the one hand, small farms of appropriated peasants, and on the other, arable farms owned by the gentry. The policy of the invaders in the Polish lands and the manner and different dates of the enfranchisement reform carried out also affected agricultural culture and production efficiency in particular areas. In the Prussian partition, where the reform took place earliest, patterns of capitalism and an agricultural culture characteristic of Western Europe were disseminated, while in the Russian partition, where the reform was carried out latest, the authorities sought to minimise land ownership by the privileged gentry (Wawrzyniak, 2004).

Differences in the way the land reform was carried out in individual parts of Poland permanently set the limits for the post-partition diversification of agriculture in Poland. The effects of it are visible not only in the modern agrarian structure, but also in regional differences in the socio-economic level of development (E. Gorzelak, 2003). A significant impact on the scale of diversification in the socio-economic structure of rural areas in Poland was caused by the border changes resulting from the Potsdam Conference of 1945. From the point of view of agricultural development, it should be emphasised that the amount of land used for agriculture in Poland decreased by 15.5% (up to 21,656 thousand ha), with up to a third of all agricultural land now located in the newly annexed western and northern territories of Poland. With these changes, the post-war map of Europe involved a massive resettlement of about 3 million Germans and about 1.5 million Poles from the territories of the then USSR (Fig. 3).
After the Second World War, state policy aimed at creating a centrally controlled economy resulted in the creation and promotion of the development of state-owned farms and agricultural production cooperatives. This is a subject that goes beyond the scope of this study; nevertheless it goes to show the source of the spatial diversity of agriculture

[32]Opolskie region is situated within the (19th century) Prussian partition, Lubelskie within the Russian partition (Figure 3).

Figure 3: **Historical and administrative regions of Poland**



Source: Chmieliński (2006) and Chmieliński, Wieliczko (2018).

in the country, undoubtedly affecting the development of rural areas.[33]

Such differences as described above also influence the level of family incomes, with Lubelskie being in 2015 among those regions with the lowest incomes (Czapiński and Panek, 2015: 39) and thus also among those with the largest share of families struggling to make ends meet (Czapiński and Panek, 2015: 43). In 2015, Opolskie was among the voivodships with the highest living conditions, while Lubelskie was among those with the lowest living conditions (Czapiński and Panek, 2015: 127).

The long-studied differences in the development of the Polish regions identified four sets of factors shaping socio-economic (and cultural) differences in Poland (G. Gorzelak et al., 2021):

1. Historically developed differences, especially the period of Poland's partition lasting 123 years until the end of the First World War.
2. Cultural factors shaping religiosity and attachment to tradition.
3. Pace of post-socialist transformation.
4. Efficiency of local government.

A synthetic picture of the differences between the Polish regions is shown along two axes (G. Gorzelak et al., 2021, Chmieliński, 2006): southwest (higher developed, better in going through the transformation) – northeast (lower values), and northwest (more modernising attitudes, higher efficiency of local governments) – southeast (more traditional attitudes).

The two regions under consideration differ significantly in their historic pathways as well as structure and socio-

[33] In 2018, the sub-regional study of the quality of governance in Poland included the Lubelskie (low EQI) and Pomorskie (highest EQI in Poland, 2017) regions. The analysis of respondents' statements and the literature study already indicated at that time that historical divisions at the regional level and spheres of influence of the different powers (empires) were associated with the quality of infrastructure, institutions and organisation of socio-economic life in different regions of Poland. Thus, they differentiate the level of quality of governance (see Chmieliński and Wieliczko 2018). It is worth noting that Pomorskie and Opolskie regions lie within the same borders of the 19th century Prussian partition and Lubelskie within the Russian partition (see Figure 3). The partition borders largely differentiate the level of development of regions in Poland, which is a border country at the meeting point of eastern and western cultures (Cf. Bański, 2022; Chmieliński, 2006).

economic situation. This diversity is well presented by Biedka et al. (2021), who proposed a classification of the Polish regions based on size of the largest city, level of unemployment and share of those employed in the agricultural sector in the total employed population. This resulted in putting Lubelskie into the category 'rural', while Opolskie went to the 'structurally burdened urban 'category (Fig. 4).

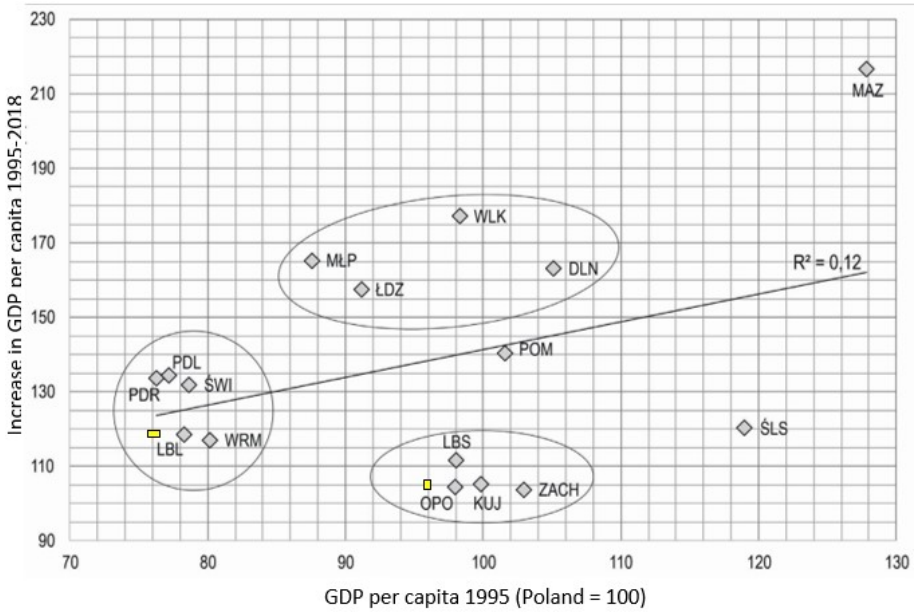
Figure 4: **Typology of Polish region by Biedka et al. (2021)**

Such differences as described above also influence the level of family incomes, with Lubelskie being in 2015 among those regions with the lowest incomes (Czapiński and Panek, 2015: 39) and thus also among those with the largest share of families struggling to make ends meet (Czapiński and Panek, 2015: 43). In 2015, Opolskie was among the voivodships with the highest living conditions, while Lubelskie was among those with the lowest living conditions (Czapiński and Panek, 2015: 127).

The degree of rurality provides a good indicator of the diversity in a region's development as it is linked to the degree of development of local infrastructure and also determines the importance of urban centres in the region (rural regions are usually less economically advanced). However, when looking at economic development measured by GDP, it can be seen that both regions are not at the top of the ranking of regions in Poland, both in terms of GDP and its growth over time (Fig. 5).

One element that strongly differentiates the regions is their relationship with other countries. Although both are border regions, Opole is characterised by strong external relations based on ethnic minority activity, but above all on its tradition of work-related migration.
In the Polish censuses of 2002 and 2011, Opolskie was the region with the largest number of emigrants per 1000 inhabitants (Fig. 6), showing that there is a tradition of emigration, especially to Germany. Lubelskie region is among the regions with a comparatively low scale of emigration. In Opolskie, due to the relatively short distance

Figure 5: **GDP growth in 1995-2018 (at constant prices) vs. GDP per capita of NUTS2 regions 1995**



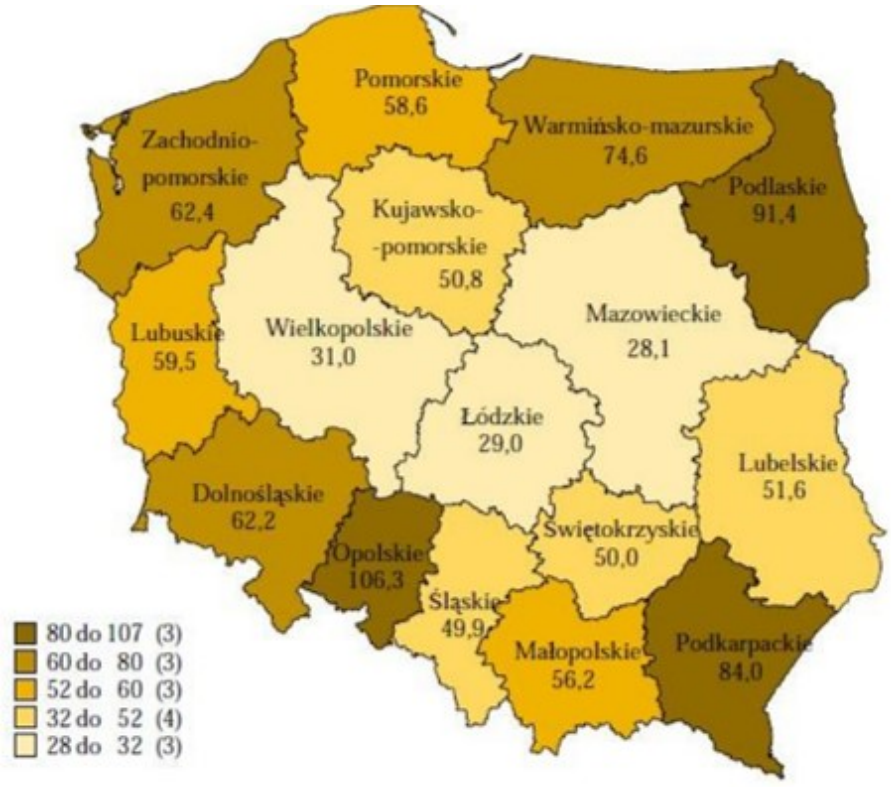
LBL – Lubelskie; OPO - Opolskie.

between the region and southern Germany, migrants often visit their families in Opolskie. Consequently, their relationship with the region is closer than in regions with more distant emigration destinations. Opolskie was, in the census of 2011, also the region with the highest percentage of households with emigrants staying abroad more than 3 months 17.8%, while the Polish average was 9.6%. In Lubelskie the percentage was slightly higher than the national average – 9.9%. An important difference is the structure of emigration in both regions. In Opolskie the majority of emigrants – 52.6% came from rural areas, while in Lubelskie the majority – 59.5% – left the cities (Statystyczny, 2013).

One element illustrating the diverse basis of regional development in Poland is the territorial diversification of voter preferences, especially relating to parliamentary elections. The quality of civil society can be assessed by analysing the electoral turnout in Poland. Usually, only about 50% of those eligible to vote participate. By contrast, in 2019 a turbulent election campaign (often referencing the fundamental values represented by the supporters of different political options) contributed to increased participation in the parliamentary elections. According to the State Electoral Commission, 61.74% of eligible voters participated in 2019 (vs: 2015 – 50.92%; 2011 – 48.92%; 2007 – 53.88%; 2005 – 40.57%; 2001 – 46.29%). In 2019 the right-wing, national-conservative Law and Justice party (PiS) won in almost all of Poland except for the big cities, the suburban areas and a few areas in the north and west of Poland. The Law and Justice party gained significant support in rural areas and, generally speaking, in the eastern part of the country. The Civic Coalition (KO), the main component of which is the Civic Platform party (the second biggest in Poland, representing liberal conservatism), achieved the second best result in the elections to the Polish Sejm (Parliament). It gained the most support in the big cities of the northern part of Poland (Szczecin, Tricity) and in the Poznań and Warsaw metropolitan areas. A sizable percentage of the population also voted for KO in the south-west part of the country, the Silesia area and the Sudety mountains (Wilczyński et al., 2019), i.e. in the areas that are part of the Opolskie region (Fig. 7).

It should be stressed that in recent decades the distribution of voter preferences on the regional map of Poland

Figure 6: **Number of emigrants staying abroad more than 3 months per 1000 inhabitants**



Source: Statystyczny, 2013, Map 3.

has followed an historical division, traditionally representing the different influences of the divisions of Poland from the 18th and 19th centuries, PiS won in 2019 in regions whose borders generally coincide with the former Austro-Hungarian and Russian partitions (Fig. 7).

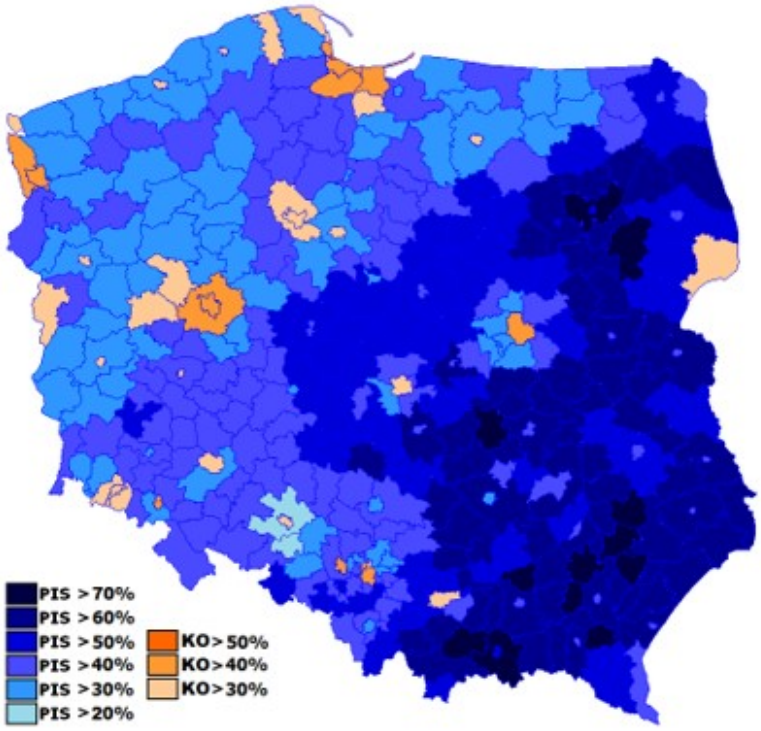
13.2.4 4. Roadmap for the rest of the report

The respondents in Lubelskie region had mixed feelings about the response of public institutions to the pandemic. They thought that the beginning of the pandemic made public institutions work harder but that later they returned to their old routine (Fig. 20).

The next two chapters describe in more detail the socio-economic and historical background to the development of the two case study regions, Lubelskie (Chapter 2) and Opolskie (Chapter 3). The analysis of the survey results for each region is presented in Chapter 4, where the EQI results are complemented by opinions voiced on the quality of the functioning of individual institutions, based on the following dimensions:

- Institutions: Politics and political parties
- Institutions: Public Administration
- Institutions: Judiciary

Figure 7: **2019 Polish parliamentary election in poviats (NUTS 3) by percentage of support**



PIS - Law and Justice; KO – Civic Coalition. Source: Waclaw Jan Kroczek, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019$_{P}olish_{p}arliamentary_{e}lection(Access$: 20.12.2022).

- Media
- Civil society
- Impact of the EU
- Impact of COVID-19.

Drawing on the section describing the results of the historical analyses and the data from the various sources of official statistics, and in conjunction with the results of the interviews, the substantive conclusions of the study are highlighted in Chapter 5

13.3 2. Description of Lubelskie

13.3.1 Historical background

The history of the region, as a part of Poland, started in the Middle Ages. Lublin, the region's capital, was founded in 1317. It remained part of Poland until the third partition of Poland in 1795, when it became part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The organisation of the Lublin region is influenced by the historically formed size structure of the cities. As it was already mentioned, Lubelskie is dominated by small centres, with a visible prevalence of towns with up to 5,000 inhabitants (one third). Small towns serve as local development centres in urban-rural and rural gminas, while the city of Lublin, as the largest city in the region, is a clear administrative and economic centre. Moreover, due to the lack of other large centres, Lubelskie remains under the strong influence of the Warsaw agglomeration, mainly for (higher) education, and the labour market.

13.3.2 Structural Conditions

Lubelskie is located in the eastern part of Poland, and its eastern border is the Polish-Ukrainian border. Lubelskie is the third voivodeship in Poland when it comes to area, while it is ninth in terms of population size (Statistics Poland, 2020, p. 42). 2,108,300 people lived in Lubelskie (end of 2019), which amounts to 5.5% of the total Polish population. Population density is much lower than the Polish average – 84 and 123 people per 1 km2 – in Lubelskie and Poland, respectively. In the period between 2010 and 2019 the number of people living in Lubelskie decreased by 2.8% and its natural increase is negative. The age structure of the region is similar to the Polish average (Tab. 2.1).

Table 2.1: Age structure of the population in Lubelskie

Age	Lubelskie	Poland
Below 25	25.4	25.3
Over 65	18.6	18.1

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2020).

Lubelskie is significantly less urbanised than the Polish average, with only 46.5% of the population living in urban areas (Polish average, 60%). Thus, the majority of the citizens in this region, 53.5%, live in rural areas. The region is among the three most rural, and it shares borders with the other two. The average wage in Lubelskie is lower than the Polish average – amounting to 90.6% and 88.5% in 2010 and 2018, respectively (Statistics Poland, 2020, p. 45). This is also reflected in the higher than Polish average share of people suffering poverty, irrespective of its definition. In the period from 2008 to2018, Lubelskie had the lowest or almost the lowest GDP per capita among the Polish regions (there are 16 regions) and this indicator fluctuated around 70% of the Polish average (Tab. 2.2).

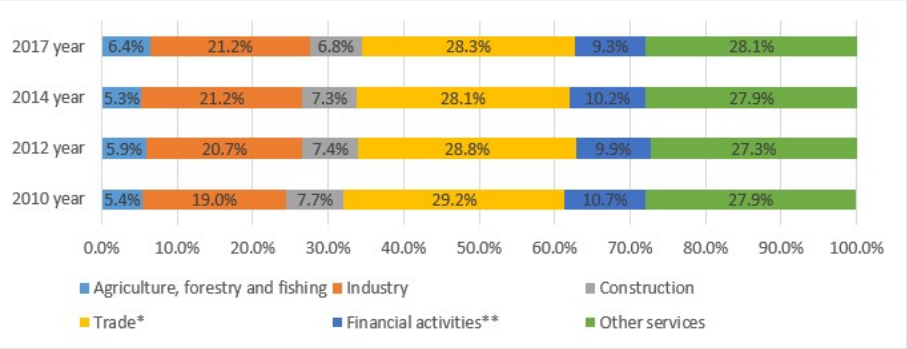
Table 2.2: GDP per capita in Lubelskie in 2008-2018

Year	% of the Polish average	Rank in Poland
2008	69.4	15
2009	67.2	16
2010	67.6	15
2011	67.9	15
2012	70.3	15
2013	70.7	16
2014	71.6	16

2015	68.5	16
2016	68.9	16
2017	69.0	16
2018	67.8	16

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020).

Figure 8: **Structure of GVA by kind of activity (current prices) in Lubelskie (in %)**



*repair of motor vehicles; transportation and storage; accommodation and catering; **information and communication. Source: Statistics Poland (2020a) and GUS (2015).

The largest share in the structure of gross value added (GVA) comes under the category 'trade, repair of motor vehicles; transportation and storage; accommodation and catering' (Fig. 8). Agriculture has a significant share of the structure of the region's economy compared with the Polish average and industry much lower, which is directly related to the scale of the GDP per capita generated in Lubelskie. The region's unemployment rate used to be lower than the Polish average, but in the period from 2009 to 2019 the situation changed significantly, and now the unemployment rate is much higher than the Polish average (Tab.2.3).

Table 2.3: GDP per capita in Lubelskie in 2008-2018

Year	Lubelskie	Poland
2005	17.0	17.6
2009	12.9	12.1
2013	14.4	13.4
2017	6.3	3.8
2019	5.5	3.3

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020).

13.3.3 Regional autonomy and funding

Poland is a unitary state. There are no regions with special autonomy rights. The current Polish administrative division into regions entered into force in 1999. Poland has 16 regions, called voivodships. The regions have their

own regional authorities and administration. The authorities of the voivodship self-government operate on the basis of, and within the limits set, by Polish law. Voivodship self-governments carry out public tasks not reserved by law to governmental administration bodies at the level of the voivodship. The scope of activities of the voivodship self-government does not violate the autonomy of the poviat and the municipality (smaller administrative units within the Polish administrative system), and the voivodship self-government bodies do not act as supervisors of the poviat and the municipality and have no authority over these units. The head of a voivodship self-government is the Marshal, who in turn is the chairman of the voivodship board – the executive organ of the voivodship self-government.

The Marshal, who acts as the head of the Marshal's Office and the head of its staff, organises the work of the voivodship board. The Marshal's Office manages the affairs of the voivodship and represents them externally. The Marshal is also the head of the provincial self-government organisational units and has the power to issue decisions in individual cases in the field of public administration.

The Marshal's Office performs the tasks belonging to the competence of the Marshal and the voivodship board, which include:

- public education, including higher education
- promotion and protection of health
- culture and the protection and care of heritage monuments
- social assistance
- pro-family policy
- modernisation of rural areas
- spatial development
- environmental protection
- water management, including flood protection, and in particular the equipment and maintenance of flood control depots
- public transport and public roads
- physical activities and tourism
- protection of consumer rights
- defence
- public safety
- counteracting unemployment and activating the local labour market
- telecommunications business.

It should be pointed out that the responsibilities of this institution overlap in many respects with the EQI's constituent subjects, such as public education, including higher education, and promotion and protection of health or public safety. The structure and scale of spending by the regional and local authorities in Lubelskie region is similar to the Polish average (Tab. 2.4). More – both as a share of total spending and per capita – is spent on transport.

Table 2.4: GDP per capita in Lubelskie in 2008-2018

Category	**1a. Lub.**	**1a. Pol.**	**2a. Lub.**	**2b. Pol.**
Agriculture and hunting	2.0	1.6	27.2	21.5
Transport and communication	10.1	8.8	134.9	117.9

Dwelling economy	1.1	1.4	14.4	19.4
Public administration	6.5	6.0	87.6	80.9
Education	33.8	34.5	453.3	464.3
Health care	2.1	2.1	28.1	27.6
Social assistance	6.5	6.8	87.7	90.7
Other tasks in sphere of social policy	1.4	1.3	18.5	18.0
Family	23.1	22.8	309.7	305.9
Municipal economy and environmental protection	8.1	8.9	109.2	119.4
Culture and protection of national heritage	3.7	4.4	49.9	59.0

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020). Category '1a and 1b' refer to Structure (in %), while '2a and 2b' refer to Euros per capita.

EU funds are a vital source of funding in Lubelskie region. The total value of projects co-financed from EU 2014-2020 spending in this region reached almost EUR 4 billion, over 11% more than the Polish average of the per capita value of such projects (Tab. 2.5). The regions' share of EU co-financed projects is very high, 6.2% of the Polish total, and is much higher than its share of Polish GDP, which is 3.7%.

Table 2.5: Registered unemployment rate in Lubelskie in %

item	**Lubelskie**	**Poland**
Total in EUR (million)	3,948.2	63,876.5
as a share of the Polish total	6.2	100
per capita in EUR	1,850.7	1,662.1
per capita Poland = 100	111.4	100

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020).

The system of towns in Lubelskie region has a hierarchical structure with the clear domination of one big city that plays the role of a centre for the whole region. Poor urbanisation of the region and the predominance of small towns and traditional agriculture mean that those factors that disintegrate the classical hierarchical systems of towns, such as competition, technological progress and increasing accessibility, do not play a significant role in Lubelskie. The small towns and development centres have a relatively lower capacity to absorb EU funds (which require 'own contributions') than in other regions (Wich et al., 2015). Consequently, the impact of modernisation from EU funds, although significant in the development of the region, has had a smaller impact on overall development than in other regions.

13.4 Description of Opolskie

13.4.1 Historical background

Opolskie region was not part of Poland for centuries. It belonged to Poland only during the years 990 to 1335 and became part of Poland again in 1922. Historically it has been part of Czechia, Austria and Germany. It is the only Polish region in which a national minority representative – a representative of the German minority – is elected to the Polish parliament.

After the socio-economic transition from socialism started in Poland in 1989, the German minority in the region developed strong organisation (KUCZAłA et al., 2014), as before the national minorities were not allowed to associate. 'The German minority is active in politics at both a local and national level. It took part in local government elections on 27th May 1990 for the first time. Since then, it has remained firmly established in the region and has formed governing coalitions with other political groupings' (Piruta et al., 2020).

Due to these historical conditions (six centuries of separation from the Polish state) and its border location, Opolskie has acquired many features that distinguish it from other Polish regions. It has its own history, culture and tradition, and since the end of the Second World War a new population structure, which consists of the Polish majority (immigrants from the eastern and central areas of pre-war Poland), the native population – the German minority, and the national-ethnic Silesian minority. Harmonious coexistence of these population groups, based on mutual respect and tolerance and openness to other cultures, also testifies to the regional distinctiveness of the area, which forms today's Opolskie region (Kisielewicz, 2015). In Opolskie, apart from the capital city Opole, there are also other important cities that play an active role in the socio-economic development of the region – Kędzierzyn-Koźle, Nysa and Brzeg.

13.4.2 Structural conditions

Opolskie region is located in the south of Poland, and its southern border is part of the Polish border with the Czech Republic. It is the smallest of the Polish regions and has the lowest population size. 982,600 people live in Opolskie (end of 2019), which amounts to 2.6% of the total Polish population. The region is less densely populated than the Polish average, with 103 people per 1km2, while the Polish average is 123. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of people living in Opolskie decreased by 3.5%. The age structure of the region is slightly worse than the Polish average, with a lower share of the population below 25 and a larger share over 65 (Tab. 3.1).

Table 3.1: Age structure of the population in Opolskie

Age	Opolskie	Poland
Below 25	22.9	25.3
Over 65	18.8	18.1

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020).

Opolskie is less urbanised than the Polish average, with 53.2% of the population living in urban areas (Polish average 60%) and 46.5% of the citizens in this region live in rural areas (Polish average 40%).

Table 3.2: GDP per capita in Opolskie in 2008-2018

Year	% of the Polish average	Rank in Poland
2008	84.8	15
2009	81.7	16
2010	79.5	15
2011	80.1	15
2012	80.8	15
2013	80.5	16
2014	95.5	16
2015	80.8	16

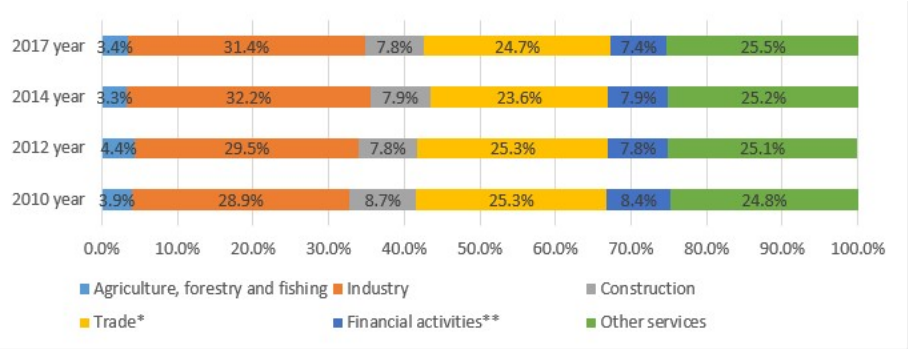
2016	79.6	16
2017	79.3	16
2018	79.4	16

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020).

The average wage/alary was lower than the Polish average, both in 2010 and 2018, and amounted, respectively, to 91.4% and 90.6% of the Polish average. Yet, the share of households suffering from poverty – irrespective of its definition – was much lower than the Polish average. This can be related to the fact that there is a tradition of working – permanently or seasonally – in Germany and supporting families remaining in Opolskie.

Almost all through the period from 2008 to 2018, Opolskie remained in 11th place among the 16 Polish regions when it came to GDP per capita. However, its GDP per capita compared to the Polish average decreased from 85% in 2008 to 80% in 2018 (Tab. 3.2). This shows that the regions' development potential is deteriorating as compared to the Polish average. The most important part of the region's gross value added is generated in its industrial sector, and the share of this sector slightly increased between 2010 and 2017 (Fig. 9). The share of other traditional sectors of the economy decreased insignificantly.

Figure 9: **Structure of GVA by kind of activity (current prices) in Opolskie (in %)**



*repair of motor vehicles; transportation and storage; accommodation and catering; **information and communication. Source: Statistics Poland (2020a) and GUS (2015).

Table 3.3: Registered unemployment rate in %

Year	Lubelskie	Poland
2005	18.7	17.6
2009	12.9	12.1
2013	14.2	13.4
2017	3.1	3.8
2019	3.2	3.3

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020).

13.4.3 Regional autonomy and funding

There are no regions with special autonomy rights in Poland. The powers of the regional authorities are presented in Chapter 2 Description of Lubelskie. Similarly, as in Lubelskie, the structure and per capita scale of expenditure of the authorities operating in the region (regional and local) resembles the Polish average and, as in the case of Lubelskie, spending on transport is higher than the average for the Polish regions (due to its remoteness). The spending on public administration is also significantly higher than the Polish average – by over 25% in per capita spending (Tab. 3.4).

Table 3.4. Structure and scale of expenditure per capita in Opolskie in 2019

Category	**1a. Lub.**	**1a. Pol.**	**2a. Lub.**	**2b. Pol.**
Agriculture and hunting	1.2	1.6	16.1	21.5
Transport and communication	10.6	8.8	141.4	117.9
Dwelling economy	2.0	1.4	26.9	19.4
Public administration	7.8	6.0	104.4	80.9
Education	33.5	34.5	448.2	464.3
Health care	1.3	2.1	17.3	27.6
Social assistance	7.4	6.8	99.0	90.7
Other tasks in sphere of social policy	1.5	1.3	19.7	18.0
Family	19.7	22.8	264.1	305.9
Municipal economy and environmental protection	8.8	8.9	117.1	119.4
Culture and protection of national heritage	4.2	4.4	56.3	59.0
Physical education	2.1	1.5	27.4	19.5
Total	100.0	100.0	1337.9	1343.9

source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020). Category '1a and 1b' refer to Structure (in %), while '2a and 2b' refer to Euros per capita.

The share of Opolskie in the total value of EU co-financed projects in the programming period 2014-2020 is 2.2%, which is similar to its share of Polish GDP – 2% (Tab. 3.5).

Table 3.5: GDP per capita in Opolskie in 2008-2018

Year	**% of the Polish average**	**Rank in Poland**
Total in EUR (million)	1,373.9	63,876.5
as a share of the Polish total	2.2	100
per capita in EUR	1,383.6	1,662.1
per capita Poland = 100	83.2	100

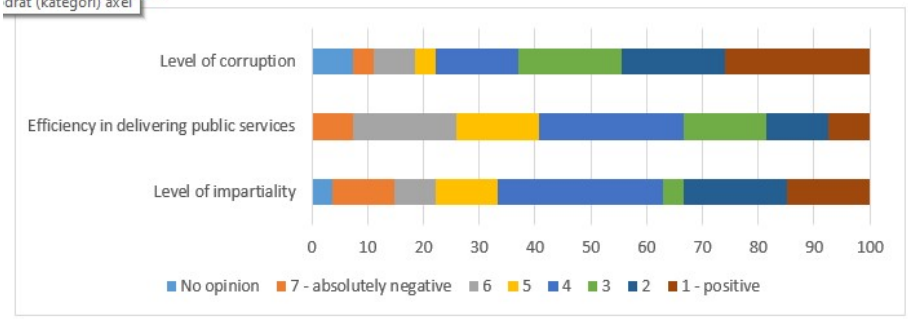
source: Own elaboration based on Statistics Poland (2010-2020).

13.5 Comparative Analysis

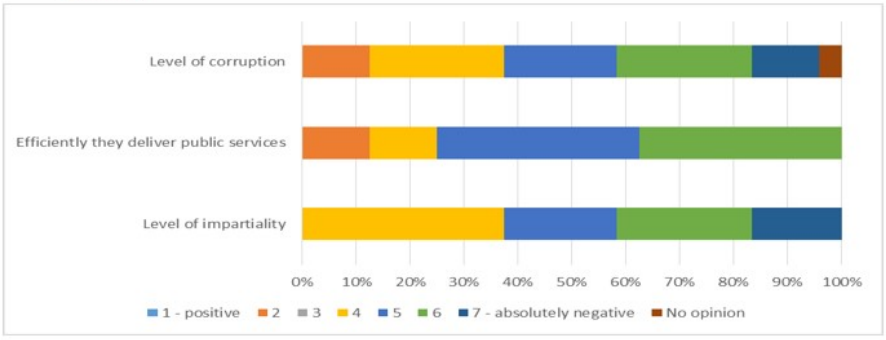
The first block of questions in the survey concerned perceptions of the quality of institutions in both regions. Respondents in Lubelskie had mixed opinions concerning the public institutions in their region. The most positive opinion was expressed when it came to corruption levels, with as many as 26% of respondents had a positive opinion about public institutions. The level of impartiality was also generally positively assessed (Fig. 10). The worst assessed was the level of efficiency in delivering public services.

Figure 10: **General image of public institutions in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskie**

A. Lubelskie



B. Opolskie



Average indications for Lubelskie and Opolskie*

	Lubelskie	Opolskie
Level of impartiality	3.7	5.2
Efficiency in delivering public services	4.1	4.9
Level of corruption	2.9	4.9

** without "no opinion" responses*

In Opolskie respondents were more critical. The question asked about the evaluation of institutions regardless of whether they are the responsibility of local, regional or national authorities. The mean response for each category indicates that in general there is a more critical attitude to institutions inPoland as a whole. Respondents justified this by citing the progressive influence of central government on the functioning of institutions in the region. This assessment was more favourable in Lubelskie, with lower expectations for the efficiency of the functioning of regional institutions.

The situation was different when asked about the efficiency of institutions in the region compared to other regions in the country. In the Opolskie voivodship, as many as 75% of respondents rated public institutions better than in other regions of Poland. Respondents generally gave better marks to the public institutions operating in the voivodship, although they were least positive about impartiality, more positive about corruption, and most positive about the quality and effectiveness of public services.

In Lubelskie the comparison with other regions showed a more mixed picture. The majority, 52.2% , stated that public institutions in Lubelskie are neither better nor worse than in other region, while 43.5% said that they are worse and only 4.3% thought that they are better than in other Polish regions.

The majority of respondents observed differences in the quality of functioning of different institutions. One of the Lubelskie interviewees stated: *'public services provided by the national administration have the lowest level of quality. There are also differences between the quality of public services provided in different sectors'. Another person said: 'I have a very unfavourable opinion of the judiciary, education and legislation on business activity. The interpretation of regulations is discretionary. Moreover, the citizens have no support at all from state bodies and they are left on their own.'*

When asked about examples of better functioning institutions in Lubelskie, the majority of study participants named institutions managed by local self-government rather than the institutions managed by national government. The interviewees agreed that the level of EQI in Lubelskie well matches the actual quality of governance in the region as compared with other Polish regions. Some of the further comments were:

'Most of the authorities in our voivodship, whether at municipality, district or voivodship level, are party-affiliated and act to benefit themselves rather than the citizens. The authorities do not aim to develop our region in the same way as other regions of the country. The emphasis is only on the development of road infrastructure.'

'I agree. The huge negative influence of politics on public institutions, the employment of people without the appropriate competences in specialist and managerial positions have very negative effects…'

Among the reasons for the low level of the EQI in Lubelskie, respondents mainly named economic factors and the ruling political party's policy. This is reflected in the comments of the interviewees:

'It is likely that the low assessment of the quality of governance is due to both limited economic resources, the politics of the groupings leading the provincial assembly and the weak position of NGOs.'

Respondents also indicated the level of trust and the ability to work together, generally summarised by one respondent who indicated that: *'it is a matter of social capital.'* The situation of the region was also connected with a general *'lack of democratic standards for civil society across the country'.*

In the Opolskie region, the independence of the regional administration from national politics is more pronounced. This is reflected in the perception of the impartiality of institutions but also in the quality of public services. The organisation of power around civil society is conducive to good governance in the region.

As already pointed out, the quality of governance is linked more to the work culture, that is the approach to responsibility, than to economic factors, both in terms of regional wealth and the salaries of employees in public institutions. The respondent from Opolskie stressed that: *' I see a lot of attention put to adequately high quality of public service delivery in government offices at different levels. Officials are being trained and they are improving their competences. It seems, however, that the prestige of the profession of civil servant is fading. The salaries, too (we're not talking about the central level, but the local and regional ones) are hardly encouraging. I personally know officials who, after several years of working in a given office, left for so-called business, often as the lowest-qualified and paid employees, but with a salary similar to those in offices and less responsibility in the workplace. Taking into account salaries in the public sector, the relatively poor opportunities for promotion and the fading prestige of the profession, I believe that civil servants in the Opolskie Voivodeship provide a good work taking into account the high quality of service.'*

Another respondent from Opolskie emphasised that: *'In terms of impartiality, I think that currently bias characterises the Voivodship Office as a body subordinate to the government. I expect that communes associated with the governing formation can count on more favourable approach/decisions, and this bias was also visible in the allocation of funds from the Government Fund for Local Investment, which was defended by the Opole Voivode (governor), although national data clearly showed favouritism to local government units associated with the governing formation. In the second tranche, for example, the city of Opole was deprived of these funds (as were the majority of municipalities associated with the German minority). (. . .) We are witnessing changes when it comes to regional media (these are now public institutions since they were bought by a national company) - both TVP Opole and, more recently, NTO (Newspaper Trybuna Opolska) are becoming platforms for communicating national government policy and promoting the government, at the expense of various local government perspectives...'*

Other opinions from Opolskie emphasise the growing links between regional institutions and central government – a process stimulated by the current authorities in the country:

'In recent years, it is hard not to notice that worldview and political issues are an important criterion in decisions, especially at the level of government administration.'
'The level of corruption varies from institution to institution depending on who oversees them. In my opinion, the level of corruption at the national level is higher than in local governments.'
'In the case of institutions subordinate to government administration, the link between some of their areas of activity and the political option currently pursued is noticeable (e.g. in the area of culture).'

When asked if there are any public institutions in their voivodship that stand out in a positive way, the respondents indicated mainly the voivodship offices:

'I think the Marshal's Office is such a place. As one of few in Poland, it implements the European Civic Budget and receives support from the European Commission in this respect. Opolskie voivodship also, to a large extent thanks to the Marshal's Office (especially the Department of Operational Programmes Coordination), occupied high positions in terms of the efficiency of implementation of European funds.'
'If one refers to general public opinion polls, the local government is well or very well perceived.'

The EQI index for Opolskie voivodship was -0.457 (on a scale of -3 to +3). This is the highest score in Poland. The respondents strongly agree with the data placing Opolskie voivodship first in the EQI ranking nationwide:

'I agree with the assessment expressed in this study. The social perception of the region's management is certainly influenced by the very efficient use of European funds, the perceived good cooperation between local governments, extensive cooperation and support for NGOs.'
'I agree with this assessment. It may be influenced by the size (compactness) of the region, rather than the unanimous cooperation of representatives of different political options.' '(...) from the perspective of the institutions with which I cooperate (. . .) it seems to me that the place is deserved. However, I do not have a comparison with other institutions of this type in other regions; hence the assessment may not be entirely objective.'

In the opinion of another respondent: *'the quality of the institutions that were surveyed (i.e. education, health care, justice) may be better than in other regions (especially the neighbouring Silesia region), but whether it is the best on the scale of 16 voivodeships - this is a phenomenon that is actually worth investigating. (. . .)' '(. . .) I appreciate the possibilities that have been implemented during the pandemic, i.e. electronic handling of some matters (e.g. receiving certificates), electronic system organising appointments/visits to offices (you know what time to come, no queues, less stress for both parties). Personally, I have not experienced bad service in any office, be it at local or regional level. The service is efficient, factual and helpful.'*

The main reasons for the positive assessment of the quality of governance in the Opolskie voivodship in comparison to other voivodships in Poland stressed by respondents are the following:

- the region's work ethos and work appreciation, i.e. 'officials value their jobs and try to do them well.'
- it's a multicultural region, which means more openness and more tolerance.
- no cult of the civil servant, as mentioned by a respondent: 'the civil servants are not an oracle, but do their job and they are helpful to citizens.'
- policy (management) and organisation of individual offices: 'the free elections of the authorities influence the fact that the managers of the offices care about the good opinion of the residents, which translates into an appropriate policy for serving the public.

The lack of a direct link between residents' income, municipal income and the quality of institutions is indicated quite clearly. The Opolskie region is also quite strongly internally economically diverse, which has to do with the different traditions of earning abroad in its different districts. Earnings abroad affect the income of local government units (due to lost taxes), although there is no apparent negative impact on the assessment of the functioning of public institutions from this. More significant for local infrastructure is permanent migration, which follows temporary migration (Cf. Jończy and Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska, 2014).

In addition, it should be remembered that the region itself is internally diverse, creating a cultural mosaic, which has an impact on the perception of the functioning of institutions in different parts of the region. Residents of Opolskie were relatively more sensitive to dissimilarities and multiculturalism: *(. . .) a fairly good economic situation of the inhabitants, especially in the municipalities in the south and east of the voivodship due to a long-lasting inflow of income capital to these municipalities by a large group of emigrants (both permanent and circular migration) connected to the German and Silesian minorities. Even before 2004, the local population had the opportunity to earn money in Germany and bring large earnings to the Opole region - this had quite a significant impact on neutralising the negative consequences of the political transformation and generated demand for local goods and services. Even today, differences between rural areas in the western and south-eastern parts of the voivodship are visible. However, it should also be mentioned that this had a negative impact on the level of local government income (lack of income tax revenues) and on the local institutional infrastructure due to the fact that some people did not return from migration (e.g. liquidation of schools, schools, transport links)'*

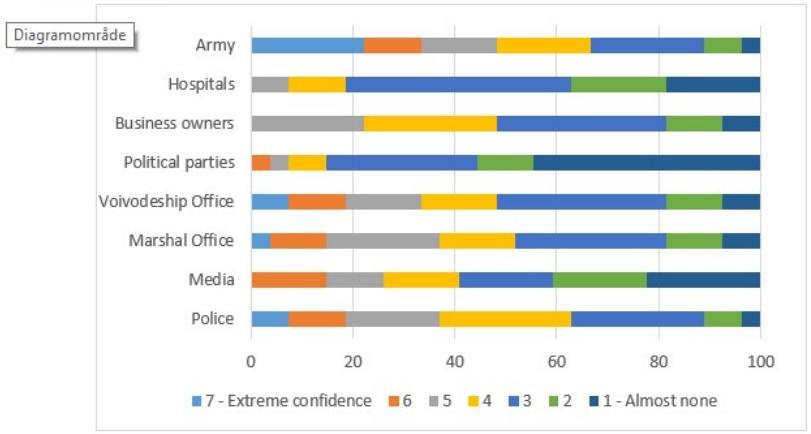
At the same time, the results on the quality of governance were linked by the respondents to the level of general satisfaction (satisfaction) with life, in this case Opolskie ranks quite high when it comes to representative surveys presented in 'Social Diagnosis', one of the leading surveys on the quality of life in Poland (Czapiński, Panek, 2015; Batorski, et. al, 2015). The multicultural background of the region and historical changes were also underlined by another respondent: *'Perhaps it is worth mentioning a certain autostereotype, which, however, concerned the period of the struggle for the Opolskie Voivodship in 1998, so the question arises about the validity of these perceptions. Research carried out by sociologists from Opole shows that when there was a fight to maintain a separate voivodships, both the elites and ordinary residents created an image of the Opole Voivodship in opposition to the Katowice Voivodship, of which the Opole region was to become a part as part of the administrative division of the country into 12 voivodships. According to the autostereotype constructed at that time, the Opolskie Voivodeship appeared to be a well-mannered, law-abiding region with better quality roads, good organisation of work, nicer-looking towns, and a political culture characterised by dialogue and readiness to compromise. The crowning example of the latter being the peaceful coexistence of representatives of different cultures - not only German, but also borderland'*

A researcher stressed that: *'recent studies by Opioła and Czepil (2020) show that municipalities with a German and Silesian minority are characterised by a higher level of participation than other municipalities in the voivodship. These are communities where the local circles of the Socio-Cultural Association of Germans in Opole Silesia play an*

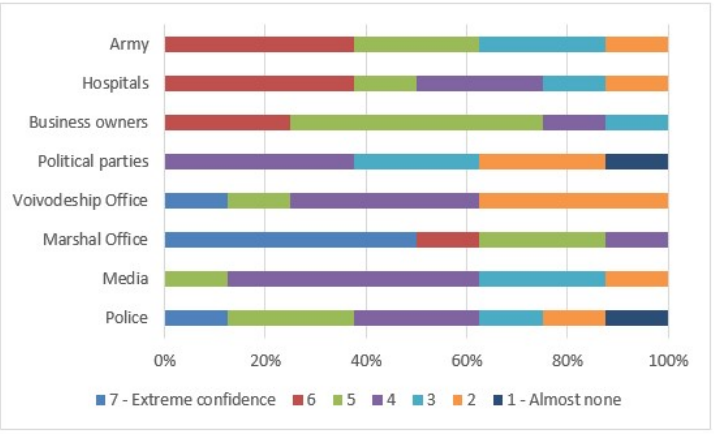
important role, the fire brigades have long traditions going back to pre-war times and many inhabitants are willing to act for the benefit of their rural communities. It should be remembered that the Socio-Cultural Association of Germans in Opole Silesia, which is the foundation of the political activity of the German minority on the scale of the voivodship, is one of the strongest non-governmental organisations in the region, so the local circles in the municipalities are part of a larger, well-organised and well-funded structure.'

Figure 11: **Level of confidence in different institutions in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskie**

A. Lubelskie



B. Opolskie



Average indications (without "no opinion") for Lubelskie and Opolskie

	Police	Media	Marshal Office	Voivodeship Office	Political parties	Business owners	Hospitals	Army
Lubelskie	4.6	3.6	4.3	4.3	2.5	3.9	3.0	5.1
Opolskie	3.9	3.6	6.0	3.8	2.9	4.9	4.5	4.5

Further opinions point to the importance of the subjective intervention of the local authorities, the geographical accessibility of the region and the related possibility of the development of individual smaller centres:

"Perhaps Opole, which has been undergoing visible changes since the new president in 2014, and the municipality itself, which occupies the highest positions in various types of local government rankings on a national scale, is also working for a good overall assessment of the quality of institutions in the region; it is worth noting that Opole clearly dominates on a provincial scale as the only, relatively large (130,000) urban centre and is additionally the centre of the smallest province in Poland (demographically and territorially), to which it is relatively close to all 10 district cities (50-60 km on average). Perhaps this size of the voivodeship and proximity to the regional capital (which is de-

veloping quite dynamically, compared to the period before 2014) has influence on the evaluation of the institutions'.

The interviewees in Lubelskie expressed highest confidence in the army. 'Extreme confidence' was the answer chosen by 22% of the persons interviewed. The army was also, ex aequo with the police, the institution with the lowest share of the answer 'almost none', with 4% of respondents choosing this option. Political parties received the lowest level of confidence with 44% of those questioned choosing the answer 'almost none'. The second worst was the media, with 22% of the respondents choosing the lowest available response. At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic it is worrying that the third worst rated institutions were hospitals, with 18.5% of the interviewees stating that they had almost no confidence in this institution.

In Opolskie respondents highlighted relatively higher trust in administrative units but also in public services and entrepreneurs. This indicates a better institutional basis, while the media remains the institution with limited trust.

Organisational culture

Public institutions in Lubelskie region are considered to operate on routine pathways, following rules and procedures. They tend to be homogeneous and to a lesser extent are willing to cooperate with other stakeholders. The short-term/long-term perspective of public institutions also strongly differs between the two regions. On average, a long-term perspective is pursued in Opolskie, while a short-term one operates in Lubelskie. In the case of the position – following rules and procedures vs. presenting and delivering concrete results – the two regions vary strongly. In Lubelskie public institutions are more concentrated on following rules and procedures, while in Opolskie they are focused on delivering concrete results.

In both regions, the assessment of the level of organisational culture is very even in the opinion of respondents. In Opolskie they tend to indicate that a stronger culture, in this respect, is represented by public administration organisations and institutions. While in Lubelskie they indicate individual competences and activity, in Opolskie they indicate features connected with the organisation and good management of the whole administrative system.

Employment in public institutions

In Lubelskie region, in the opinion of most of the interviewees, the people at the top of public sector organisations were appointed to these positions thanks to their personal or political connections rather than their skills and professional experience. The most representative opinion for this question was: 'Personal/political connections matter most. Competence is of little importance.' The majority of respondents think that this is not only typical of their region but is a general practice in Poland.

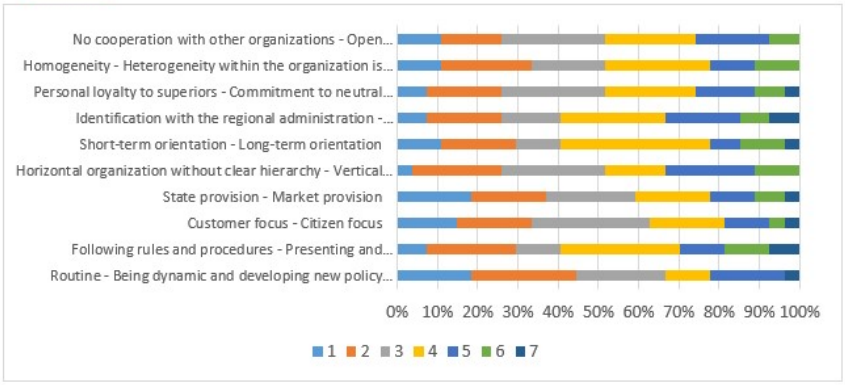
Also, the same employment mechanism applies in the case of other positions in public institutions. However, more interviewees also mentioned the importance of skills. The best summary of the opinions expressed by the participants is the statement: 'I think that to a large extent, connections and then competence.' In the opinion of the respondents this employment mechanism is similar to those applied in other Polish regions.

To have a successful career in the public sector in Lubelskie, according to the participants, one needs to have good personal and/or political connections. This was assessed as being similar as in other regions. However, some interviewees stated that this applied to an even larger extent in Lubelskie.

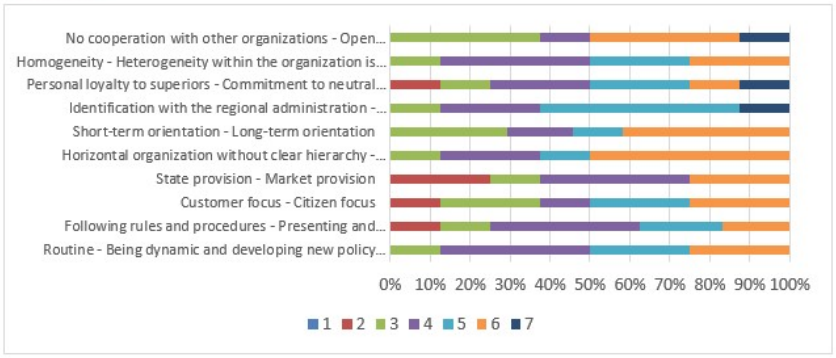
Judiciary

Figure 12: **Organisational culture of public institutions in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskiee**

A. Lubelskie



B. Opolskie



** 1 indicates an unfavourable phenomenon and 7 an absolutely favourable phenomenon.*

Average indications for Lubelskie and Opolskie

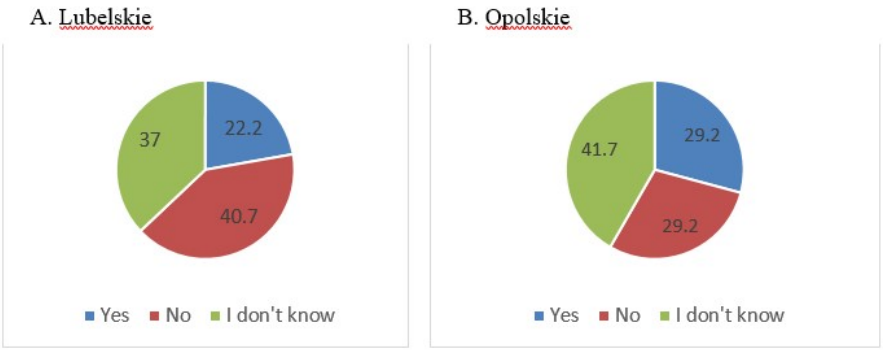
Organizational culture 1 – 7, where:	Lubelskie	Opolskie
1. Routine – 7. Being dynamic and developing new policy agendas	3.0	4.6
1. Following rules and procedures – 7. Presenting and delivering concrete results	3.8	4.2
1. Customer focus – 7. Citizen focus	3.2	4.3
1. State provision – 7. Market provision	3.2	3.9
1. Horizontal organization without clear hierarchy – 7. Vertical organization with clear hierarchy	3.6	5.0
1. Short-term orientation - Long-term orientation	3.6	4.7
1. Identification with the regional administration – 7. Identification with profession or job content	3.8	4.8
1. Personal loyalty to superiors – 7. Commitment to neutral expertise and knowledge	3.6	4.5
1. Homogeneity – 7. Heterogeneity within the organization is preferable	3.4	4.6
1. No cooperation with other organizations – 7. Open cooperation with other organization	3.4	4.8

Respondents in Lubelskie region are skeptical about the chances that public employees would turn to media or corresponding authorities if they discovered something wrong in their organisation. Only 1/5 of the interviewees said that in such a situation a public employee would inform the media, the judiciary or the authorities.

Figure 13 shows the responses in Lubelskie and Opolskie to the question: 'Imagine that a public employee discovers that something is wrong in her organization (e.g. that his/her superior or a politician has been engaging in dubious deals with entrenched interests, or are planning to do so), what do you think he/she will do? Will he/she report it to the media, to the relevant authority or to the judiciary?'

In Opolskie the situation is slightly more favorable, as more answers (nearly 30%) indicated the possibility of pointing out irregularities and informing the appropriate institutions. It should be noted that due to the high level of surveillance by government institutions in the socialist era, informing the authorities is still perceived rather

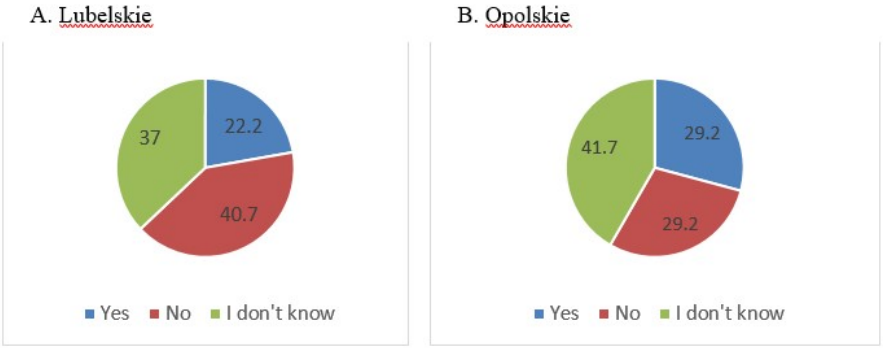
Figure 13: **Opinions on Reporting Wrong-doing in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskiee**



negatively in Poland and this increases with age (and the presence of memories from before 1989).

Almost half of the interviewed citizens of Lubelskie region are of the opinion that a whistleblower would fear repercussions in relation to reporting irregularities in their institution (Fig. 14). Over 75% of the respondents chose answers 1-3. This is well explained by the opinion shared by over 50% of the respondents that there is no adequate protection for whistleblowers and that they can expect to suffer from different forms of repercussions. Such opinions are best summarised by one of the respondents: *'There is no such protection. The courts do not work properly, the police do not deal with such cases, there are no resources and people who could provide protection in such a case. And where will such a person later find a job?'* The other interviewee stated: *'There is a complete lack of protection. A citizen disclosing information must have tremendous civil courage and honour and expect to be blacklisted in all the public institutions. Unless he is a well-known person and has support, it is always a risk, especially with a dependent family.'*

Figure 14: **Will this public employee fear repercussions if she decides to "blow the whistle"?**



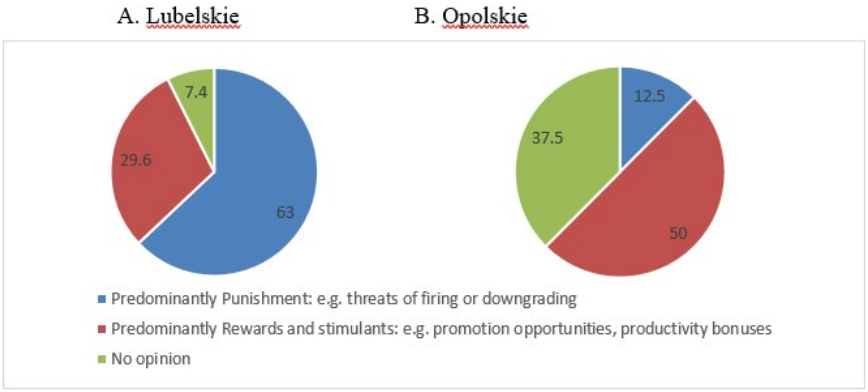
Most of Opolskie respondents noted that usually citizens are eager to express (especially on the Internet) their dissatisfaction with various irregularities in the region. Irregularities are reported by the media, including social media, but it is often information about the results of inspections carried out by various public institutions that were established for this purpose. It is different in the case of whistleblowing at work; here, similarly to Lubelskie, Opolskie residents indicated fear of repercussions for whistleblowers in the workplace. Such opinions were expressed by about 60% of respondents, and a relative freedom in this respect was indicated by about 10%.

According to the respondents from Opolskie, citizens slightly more openly express their dissatisfaction when cases of corrupt acts are made public / publicised. As one of them points out: *' (. . .) citizens would rather express their*

dissatisfaction loudly. But here again it would all depend on the scale of the act and the situation of the person who commits it. If it was a corrupt act to give a small gift (e.g. coffee or a box of chocolates), I think that looking at the scale of corruption in central government, nobody would even react. If it was the acceptance of a bribe in the form of cash, such an action would be condemned by society. The job of an official is one of high public trust, with access to a lot of sensitive data, and there would be no understanding here for such abuse of one's position.'

In the opinion of the respondents, in the public institutions of the Lubelskie region punishment is used predominantly rather than reward to enforce the compliance and good conduct of public service employees (Fig. 15). Here, a rather significant difference in approach to motivating employees in public institutions emerges. In Opolskie, as many as half of the respondents indicated that institutions employ a reward policy as a strategy for enforcing good work, but more than one third had no experience or knowledge of this.

Figure 15: **Responses of A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskie respondents to the question of predominant strategy used in the region in order to enforce the compliance and good conduct of the employees in the public service**



Respondents in Lubelskie region generally stated that the existence of codes of conduct is irrelevant. As one of the interviewees put it: 'Codes exist, but the question is whether they are followed. After all, even at the national level, there are no good examples in this area.' In the opinion of the majority of the respondents from Lubelskie region, citizens become ever more indifferent to corruption cases. As expressed by one of the interviewees: *'Society is becoming more and more indifferent. There are so many of these phenomena, and there are no or few consequences.'* The agency most involved in revealing corruption in Lubelskie region is the media, as one person put it: 'The quickest way is through the media.'

The respondents named a wide range of institutions responsible for prosecuting corruption. Among them there were: the police, the Central Anticorruption Office, the judiciary, the Internal Security Agency, the Supreme Audit Office, the Central Bureau of Investigation, and the prosecutor's office. Yet, some of the interviewees also expressed skepticism that these institutions are actively dealing with corruption cases: *'Probably not anymore. Formally, yes, the Supreme Audit Office, the Internal Security Agency, the police, the Central Bureau of Investigation, but... I guess all structures have been manipulated enough to be just a tool in the hands of the government authorities... especially the Ministry of "Justice". The network of political and business connections, protection of self and loved ones, surveillance systems lead the country down the slope....'*

In Opolskie respondents did not particularly comment on this phenomenon, usually referring to 'a job well done' as the general rule of the institution's activities (less connected with a system of penalties or rewards). At the same

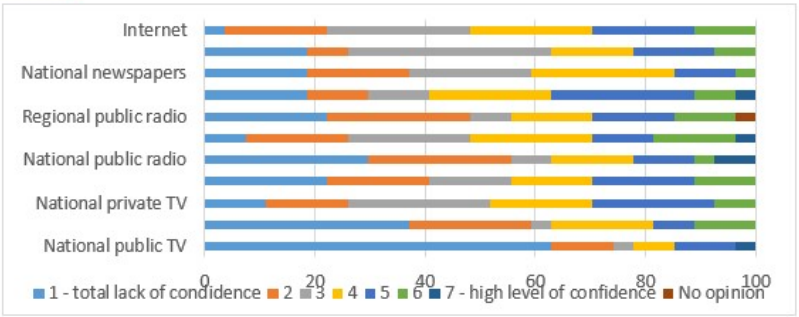
time, they expressed their skepticism about the effectiveness of public services in tracking down irregularities given the increasing influence of central government on their independence.

Media

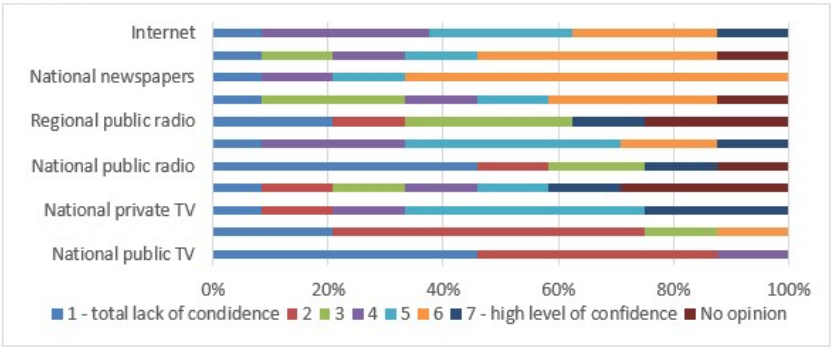
As already mentioned, the media is not much trusted in Lubelskie. According to respondents, the least reliable source of news is the national state television, with over 60% expressing a total lack of confidence. Also, regional public television and national public radio were among the least trustworthy news sources. The difference in level of confidence is also related to media popularity and the type of issues they focus on. The national media are more popular and visible, while regional media tend to concentrate on less political issues. The internet is better perceived because respondents observe only the sources of their choice, while it is hard to escape the narratives presented by national public television.

Figure 16: **Level of confidence in the news in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskie**

A. Lubelskie



B. Opolskie



Average indications for Lubelskie and Opolskie

	A. Lubelskie	B. Opolskie
National public TV	2.1	1.6
Regional public TV	2.7	2.1
National private TV	3.5	4.1
Regional private TV	3.2	3.3
National public radio	2.9	2.1
National private radio	3.7	4.3
Regional public radio	3.1	2.5
Regional private radio	3.6	3.7
National newspapers	3.0	4.6
Regional newspapers	3.2	4.1
Internet	3.7	4.3

In Opolskie, respondents generally stressed that private media are more credible because they are not directly

subordinated to the local or governmental authorities, although the objectivity and independence of the private media depends on its financial condition. Local or regional media are usually financially weaker, so they may even indirectly try to not come into conflict with the authorities, as in their opinion this may negatively influence their financial situation (e.g. by ordering or not ordering advertisements) – *'the private media are also dependent (e.g. in a financial sense). I would rather think of it in terms of the degree of autonomy, in terms of being able to do critical interventionist or investigative journalism, or just publishing information that is unfavourable to any authority (in this sense private media have more autonomy.)'*

One can also note a generally higher trust in media representing more diverse opinions. Of note is the position of the Internet as a medium of freedom when it comes to local space. This is mainly due to *"the development of the Internet and social media, which create new opportunities for journalistic work and for describing local reality. I am referring here to local media, which are still weak and face the problems I have already mentioned, but this does not mean that there are no examples of them fulfilling their control function'.*

The question about the existence of obstacles to the freedom of the press in the region divided the interviewees in Lubelskie into three almost equal groups. The first considered that there are no threats to the freedom of the press in Lubelskie, the second considered the current Law and Justice national government and local politician of this party, as well as the state company Orlen, which recently bought a network of regional newspapers in different regions (Polska Press Group), to be a threat. Some people in this group also mentioned the state of emergency recently introduced in some poviats (two in Lubelskie region – 68 towns and villages), which is related to the problem of the Łukaszenka caused border migration (refugee) crises. This means that journalists cannot enter the poviats in which this state of emergency has been introduced. The third group mentioned other factors threatening press freedom in the region, such as corruption, conformism, capital concentration, and the low number of independent sales outlets.

Most respondents stated that it was impossible to know whether local media hide any news/events. Only some respondents stated that public media exaggerate some events to show the ruling party in a better light: 'Information favourable to the political factions ruling the region is exaggerated and unfavourable events are concealed.' The refugee issue was mentioned as an example of the issues hidden/not fully described by media.

All respondents in Opolskie agreed that the news in the local media described rather well what is happening in the region. However, taking into account the general situation in Poland, they indicated that the media in the region are less and less independent:

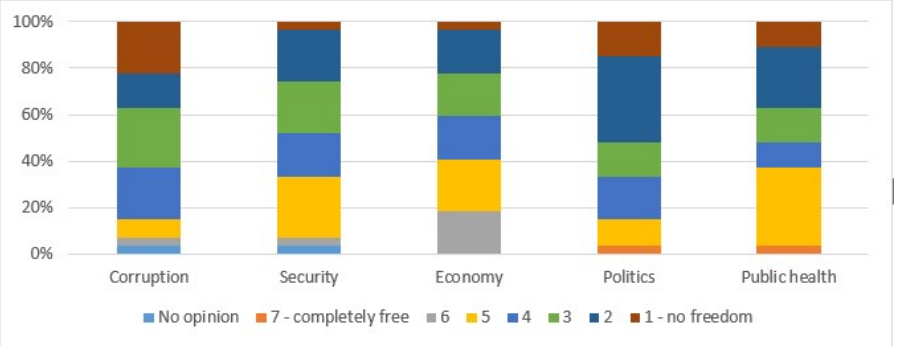
'The owner of the largest daily newspaper in the region (NTO - Nowa Trybuna Opolska) is now PKN Orlen. Since the newspaper changed ownership, the narrative of the articles has also changed. Another newspaper, Gazeta Wyborcza in Opole, is theoretically more independent, but the editorial staff has been reduced to a minimum. As a result, journalists are not able to take up important, controversial topics because they do not have the time. In the media, content has to be delivered on a daily basis, and tackling a difficult topic takes a journalist out of newsgathering for a while. The factor which most affects the freedom to work is the ever-decreasing funding.'

The media's freedom to report what is happening in Lubelskie depends on the issue. Over 1/5 of respondents consider that media have no freedom to report about cases of corruption. In the case of politics, such an opinion was expressed by 15% of respondents. It was believed that the most freedom applied to reporting about the economy.

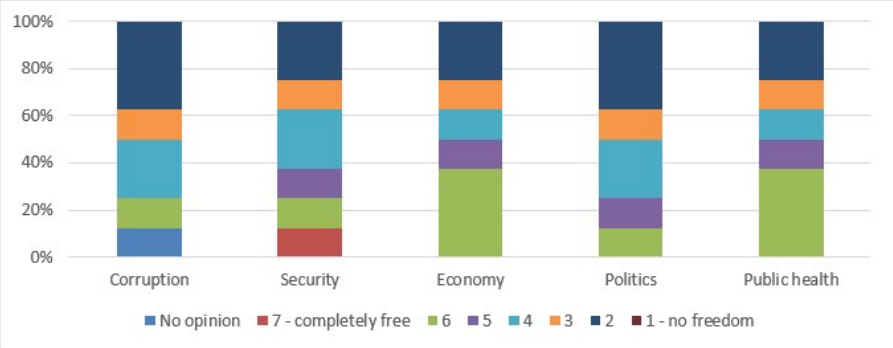
In Opolskie, it was pointed out that the media are free to present what is going on in the region as far as the economy, security or public health is concerned but more limited when it comes to politics or corruption. It can be seen that in Opole general opinions about media freedom in reporting various incidents are slightly more positive

Figure 17: **Freedom to report what is happening in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskie**

A. Lubelskie



B. Opolskie



Average indications for Lubelskie and Opolskie

	Corruption	Security	Economy	Politics	Public health
Lubelskie	2.9	3.5	3.9	2.9	3.4
Opolskie	3.3	4.1	4.3	3.5	4.3

(Fig. 17).

In Opolskie it was indicated that there is less freedom of the press today than twenty years ago. The respondent underlines this: *'Freedom of the press is now a slogan. If political power, central power, owns shares in the press, it is difficult to expect the press to be independent and free.'*

Another emphasises: *'It is difficult not to see a clear worldview or political line in the coverage of the media, including private media. Which in itself is not something special in the world, but I think it is becoming increasingly difficult to see an attempt at a reasonably objective view of the events presented or their presentation from different points of view.'* According to respondents, obstacles to press freedom in the province relate to problems faced by local and regional media throughout the country:

- a general tendency towards centralisation of the media market
- dependence on local entrepreneurs and local government as important advertisers
- lack of general trust in the impartiality of opinions presented in the media
- problems with access to public information in journalistic work
- greater interest of the public in entertainment-oriented journalism instead of journalism focused on important public issues
- proximity of journalistic and political/official circles that is typical for small communities.

The Reuters Institute (2021) at the University of Oxford, in its annual media report, notes the strong polarisation

of the market and the low level of trust in the public media. Less than 50% of Poles declare that they trust the media. Among all media, the most trusted is private radio – RMF FM, which is trusted by 68% of respondents, followed by TVN and Polsat (private television channels) and regional newspapers (58%). The lowest media in the trust ranking is public television, which is trusted by slightly more than one third of respondents. The report shows that invariably, for several years, the most important source of information in Poland has been the internet. Over the 2015-2020 period, the use of internet as a source of news was stable, at the level of 84%. Fewer and fewer people get their information from television – a drop from 81% to 75% between 2015 and 2020. Radio came in third place with a result of 66% (up 14 percentage points since 2015). Finally came the printed press – read by 24 per cent of respondents (down 4 percentage points in this period). Local media are still a fairly important part of the news market in Poland, but now their popularity is declining, in favour of the internet (and news platforms).

Violation of Impartiality

The issue of trust in public institutions is related to good governance, primarily in terms of an impartial system for promoting and hiring public officials. First of all, it should be noted that in Lubelskie respondents indicated that personal connections as well as political affiliations or wealth status have a very high impact on the opportunity to obtain preferential access to public services. Ethnic preferences were mentioned to a lesser extent (Fig. 18).

Most people questioned in Lubelskie do not recall a case in which a public institution had been accused of favouritism or violating impartiality. However, they are sure that there are such cases and that they are likely to happen again in the future.

In Opolskie, there is much less perception of the privileged use of public services according to social status, ethnicity or wealth. In the interviews, access to services was assessed as fairly uniform for all residents of the region. To some extent, they indicated that wealth helps with preferential access to public services.

Respondents in Opolskie more often emphasised that merit and competence are usually important for obtaining managerial positions in public sector institutions, but this depends on the level of the position in the hierarchy: *'The higher the level of power, the more tempting it is, so these positions tend to be politically filled, especially if they involve a correspondingly high salary. It is no secret that in politically connected institutions, artificial managerial positions were and still are created or existing ones are filled by politically connected people.'*
'Competence may lie with lower-level employees or freely elected bodies (e.g. local authorities). This is where social capital is important.'
'At local government level competence, at national level connections.'

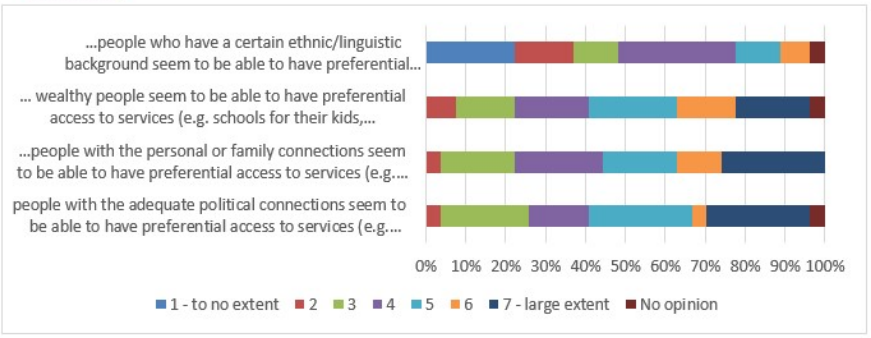
In general, it should be noted that the inhabitants of Lubelskie assess the lack of impartiality in access to public services more critically than the inhabitants of Opolskie region. Both groups believe that the wealthy can count on higher preferences. However, it is interesting that relatively more respondents in Lubelskie indicated ethnic background as a factor relating topreference for access to public services, in relation to the other questions, but also in relation to the inhabitants of Opolskie (mean score of 3.2 versus 2.6, on a scale of 1-7, where 7 means large extent).

Impact of EU

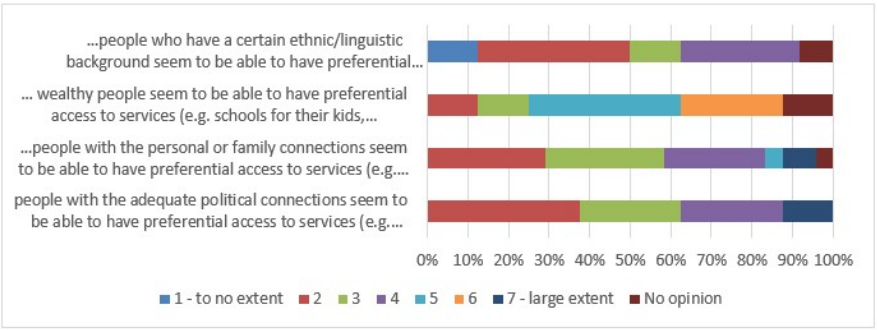
Respondents had mixed feeling when forecasting the quality of governance in Lubelskie in the next 5 years. Only 40% hoped for improvement, while the majority was pessimistic. Some of the respondents stated that the direction of change depended on whether the ruling political party remained in power. If it remained so, further deterioration or lack of any change in the quality of governance was expected

Figure 18: **Factors determining preferential access to public services in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskie**

A. Lubelskie



B. Opolskie



Average indications (excluding "no opinion") for Lubelskie and Opolskie

	Lubelskie	Opolskie
people with the adequate political connections seem to be able to have preferential access to services (e.g. schools for their kids, preferential health care, operating business licenses)	4.8	3.4
…people with the personal or family connections seem to be able to have preferential access to services (e.g. schools for their kids, preferential health care, operating business licenses)	4.9	3.4
… wealthy people seem to be able to have preferential access to services (e.g. schools for their kids, preferential health care, operating business licenses)	4.8	4.6
…people who have a certain ethnic/linguistic background seem to be able to have preferential access to services (e.g. schools for their kids, preferential health care, operating business licenses)	3.2	2.6

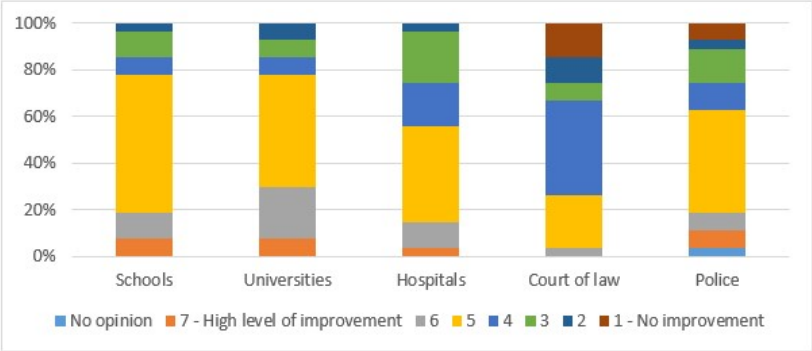
The respondents saw a significant improvement in the quality of services provided by public institutions after EU accession. The largest improvement was seen in education – schools and universities, although it was much smaller in the case of hospitals. The lowest rankings were for the courts and police, where 15% and 7% of respondents, respectively, saw no improvement (Figure 19).

Respondents listed digitalisation of public administration, modernisation of buildings and improvements in the quality of public services as positive changes observed during the last 10 years. SoDme pointed to improvements in the treatment of citizens when dealing with public administration. Among the negative changes, they named growing bureaucracy, corruption, and nepotism. The most negative feeling they had was about freezing the medical care for patients with illnesses other than Covid, but for other aspects they generally stated that the response was better than one could imagine, if one ever imagined such a situation.

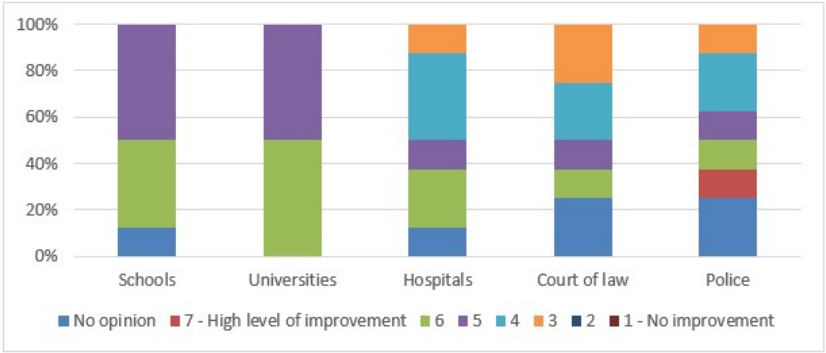
Similarly to Lubelskie, respondents in Opolskie also saw the biggest positive changes in the development of an educational infrastructure, i.e. the general situation of schools and universities, and to a lesser extent other institu-

Figure 19: **Level of improvement of the services provided by public institutions after the EU accession in A. Lubelskie and B. Opolskie**

A. Lubelskie



B. Opolskie



Average indications (without "no opinion") for Lubelskie and Opolskie

	Schools	Universities	Hospitals	Court of law	Police
Lubelskie	4.9	4.9	4.4	3.6	4.4
Opolskie	5.4	5.5	4.6	4.2	4.8

tions. The level of improvement in the services provided by public institutions generally increased after accession, but this was mainly in relation to the investment and the opportunities for the development of these institutions by EU programmes and funds.

Problems with the functioning of public administration after accession to the EU usually focus on bureaucracy and the excessive burdens associated with it, but on the other hand, in Opolskie, we observe improved transparency of procedures and institutional efficiency. This influences greater public involvement and increased civic awareness, which is related to problems associated with the availability of activities and resources that support such attitudes.

However, reduction in the decentralisation of power and the tendency to reduce expenditure on the maintenance of public services (political expressions of austerity in the country) may negatively affect the quality of human resources in public administration: *'on the other hand, the difficult financial situation in the public sector may reflect negatively on the work of public sector employees. Progressive partisanship of the state and appointments according to clientelistic criteria may also lead to deterioration of the public administration.'*

In the opinion of the majority of respondents from both regions, EU membership has introduced new institutional principles for planning and implementing regional policy based on participation and cooperation with NGOs and citizens, using more transparent rules for planning, implementing and evaluating support programmes. Thus, in the general opinion, despite the bureaucracy (usually pointed to in criticism of Structural Funds), positives, such as

the legitimacy of planning, the high impact (through the size of the funding budget) and clear rules for beneficiaries, are usually pointed out. This has also benefited the perception of public institutions, their staff and the regional policy pursued. On the other hand, the quality of the institutions is dependent on the quality of planning, the way (and legitimacy) EU funds are spent and thus their real effects in the region.

As one respondent from Opolskie pointed out: *'First and foremost, the influx of funds has allowed the implementation of various types of projects, both hard (e.g. infrastructural) and soft (competences, education). Additional institutions for "business-related" support, but also for fighting social problems (e.g. social integration centres) were created. With the inflow of funds a new layer of officials dealing with structural policy was created They participate in numerous training programmes and also learn the principles of good governance, but it seems to me that this applies to all Opolskie (I remind you that the entire Priority V under the Operational Programme Human Capital 2007-2013 concerned the implementation of the principles of good governance) (. . .) This refers to strengthening consultation mechanisms and cooperation with social partners and non-government organisations as regards making and implementing public policies and legal regulations, and to implementation of public tasks, including also measures related to social supervision over public institutions.'*

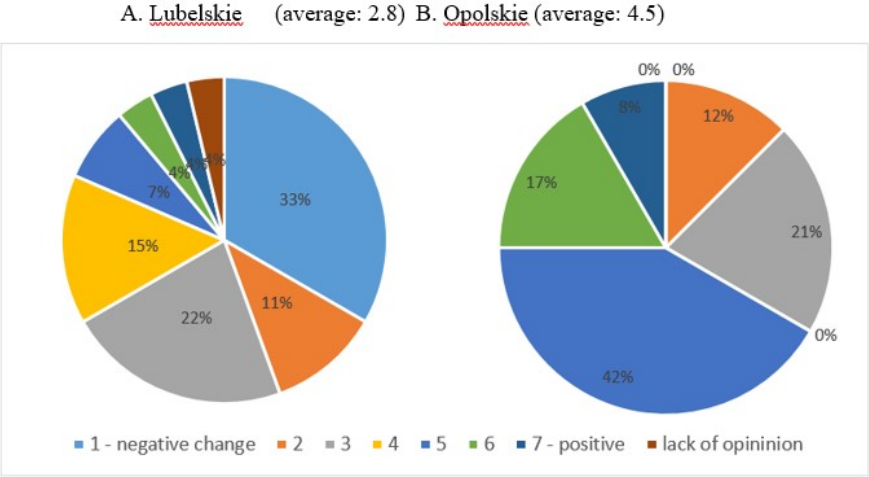
In terms of changes in the quality of governance over the next five years, respondents in the Opolskie region strongly indicated that they expect improvements, which is primarily related to the new financial perspective and good EU policy programming, also at the regional level.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The respondents in Lubelskie region had mixed feelings about the response of public institutions to the pandemic. They thought that the beginning of the pandemic made public institutions work harder but that later they returned to their old routine (Fig. 20).

The pandemic produced mixed feelings about the future of the quality of public services in Lubelskie region. The question posed by most of the respondents related to the length of the COVID-19 pandemic determining potential changes in the functioning of public institutions. Generally, respondents stated that with the current political party in power such changes could only be for the worse.

Figure 20: **Answers to the question: Have you observed a negative/positive change in the quality of public services since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis?**



In terms of the approach to the pandemic (COVID 19) in the Opolskie region, it was felt that the institutions, mainly using their own resources and planning, adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic requirements in the face of a rather chaotic policy by the central authorities:
'At national level, I do not know where to start: a lack of respirators? the lack of masks or disinfectant fluids? My opinion is negative. At regional and local level, I even saw a "rush to action". Institutions, mainly on their own, were adapting to the requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic: the electronic petitioner service, disinfectants, respecting the limits of access to facilities, inquiry boxes, separation plexiglass, personal protective equipment, the tremendous determination of management and staff.'

In the face of the pandemic, the determination of the regional authorities and public institutions' staff had the greatest influence on the possibility of a relatively good organisation of assistance to inhabitants and their continuing social life and organisation of the functioning of public administration. For example: *'. . . the administration head (starost) of Krapkowice municipality, with the deputy starost and a section of the office, personally directed the "traffic" at the swabbing point on COVID. . . I believe they have done well in reducing the impact of the pandemic.'*

Both regions emphasised the individual actions of administration staff, NGOs and public institutions in the region (with particular emphasis on the health services) in mitigating the effects of the pandemic and its impact on the lives of residents. At the same time, in Opolskie these positive actions were relatively more often juxtaposed to the low efficiency of public services at the national level. In Lubelskie, the actions of the regional and national authorities were assessed moderately well:
'Public institutions have taken extensive measures to limit the negative effects of the pandemic on society and the economy. The regional government initiated, among other things, the campaign Opole supports itself, which not only provided assistance from the local government, but also had a positive impact on the activation of other entities. It probably had a real impact on reducing these negative effects. This is confirmed by public statistic data, in which entrepreneurs in Opolskie rated the negative impact of COVID-19 lower than the national average.'

The majority of respondents in Lubelskie region stated that the quality of services provided by public institutions deteriorated after the COVID-19 pandemic. The worst deterioration was observed in the case of hospitals and schools (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Average score for assessment of the change in the services provided by public institutions after the COVID-19 crisis (1-7 scale, where 7 means very positive

Category	Lubelskie	Opolskie
Schools	2.7	3.9
Universities	3.3	4.3
Hospitals	2.0	3.9
Judicial courts	2.7	4.1
Police	3.9	4.6

In Opolskie, respondents generally gave better marks to individual institutions in terms of their actions in the face of COVID-19, while pointing to the chaos in the organisation of in-patient and distance learning, which was rather due to the decisions of Government Ministries and the lack of adequate resources for the proper implementation of distance learning. The same was true of the health service, which, confused by the lack of transparency in its efforts to organise treatment in the crisis, revealed its structural backwardness.

The actions of the police, active in the organisation of traffic, control of the public during quarantine, or assistance to residents, were, relatively, best evaluated in both regions. The feedback from respondents in both regions

suggested that, overall, services in the regions showed much better organisation than at the national level. The low rating of health services indicates the relatively low efficiency of the system in the face of crises, which is revealed by the relatively low indicators showing public expenditure and the number of doctors and nurses per capita in Poland. Eurostat data shows that Poland allocated the least resources (4.8 per cent of GDP in 2020) to health care among all EU countries. OECD data shows that Poland is at the bottom of the ranking of European countries in terms of the availability of doctors and nurses per capita[34].

[34]EUROSTAT: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Healthcare$_expenditure_statistics(access$: 29.12.2021).$OECD : https : //www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/data - insights/number - of - medical - doctors - and - nurses?utm_term = PACutm_medium = socialutm_source = twitterutm_content = (acccess$: 29.12.2021)

13.6 Conclusions

It should be stressed that the economic situation has had only a limited influence on the quality of governance in these cases. Instead, the evidence points in this respect to the traditions inherent in (or representing) a particular value system and the corresponding culture of the organisation of social life. Macroeconomic indicators do not place either region at the forefront of economic development among voivodeships in the country. The proximity of strong agglomerations (for Lubeskie – Warsaw and for Opolskie – Wrocław, Katowice) was, and still often is, perceived as a factor negatively influencing the pace of development, e.g. by drawing out human capital.

These relations are reinforced by the structure of the regions, more precisely by the number and density of the regionally located economic and social centres. The higher the proportion of cities in a region, the better it is for the importance, development and functional quality of institutions.

Size and structure (Opolskie – polycentric; Lubelskie – with one dominating centre) influence the perceived quality of governance. Other studies also confirm the historically (and thus culturally and ethnically) shaped differences that persist and determine the present work ethic and development trajectories.

Respondents in Lubelskie have mixed opinions concerning public institutions in their region. Only 26% of respondents had a positive opinion about public institutions. The most positive opinion was expressed when it came to the level of corruption While the level of impartiality was generally positively assessed, the worst assessed was the level of efficiency in delivering public services. In the Opolskie voivodship, as many as 75% of respondents rated public institutions better than in other regions of Poland. Respondents generally gave better marks to the public institutions operating in the voivodship, although they were least positive about impartiality. They were more favourable about corruption and most favourable about the quality and effectiveness of public services.

Strong differences in EQI scores are related to the level of trust in individual institutions and the degree of their politicisation, which can be seen when comparing the two regions. In Opolskie region the level of trust in institutions is clearly higher. The social perception of the region's management is certainly influenced by a very efficient use of European funds, perceived good cooperation between local government units, and extensive cooperation with, and support for, NGOs.

In both regions private media are perceived as more credible due to the fact that they are not directly subordinated to local or governmental authorities. According to the respondents, the media should help to control the correctness of the procedures applied by the institutions. Where central administrations execute strong control over public media, they lack opportunity or motivation to reveal irregularities, and they rather become a tool for the promulgation of policy information. In the case of private media this happens to a much lesser extent, although it is important that public institutions still remain very significant advertisers at both regional and national levels. The advertising budgets of administrations can significantly influence the economic condition of the media, as well as their development and competitive position. This also may influence the independence of journalists and their choice of topics. Information available on the Internet is gaining an increasing role, especially for young people.

It should be emphasised that the difficult financial situation in the public sector may have a negative impact on the work of public sector employees. The increasing partisanship of the state and appointment to positions according to clientelistic criteria may also lead to the deterioration of public administration.

Public opinion is increasingly critical about various irregularities, expressing a negative assessment rather than noticing positives or successes. However, it seems that there is still a relatively high level of indifference, a kind of latent consent to those irregularities that occur.It should be emphasised that the quality of governance in both regions is fundamentally influenced by historical conditions, which in turn affect the quality of public institutions

and degree of resistance to various contemporary influences. These include:

- the region's work ethos and appreciation of work
- whether the region is multicultural, which means more openness and more tolerance – one of the regions analysed has a certain historical/structural advantage in this respect, while the other is more homogeneous
- the lack of a cult of the civil servant – the work ethos of the civil servant is based on his/her servile attitude towards citizens, which has its roots in historical circumstances and the extent to which civil servants have a public service ethos'
- the policy and management of individual offices/administration units
- the free election of authorities influences the fact that office managers care about the good opinion of the residents, which translates into an appropriate service provision policy.

The economic situation of residents is also of great importance, particularly due to the large number of emigrants (with both permanent and circular migration apparent). This has an additional impact on general life satisfaction and produces diversity in the structure of the parties present in local-government, with implications for the need for dialogue. The research carried out in the Opolskie voivodship shows that municipalities with German and Silesian minorities are characterised by a higher level of participation than other communes in the voivodeship. Here, long-established structures, such as organisations representing various social groups, including ethnic minorities, are of great importance, both for the tradition of membership of community associations and for the local authorities' tradition of including various organisations in the policy decision-making processes.

The results of the study confirm that the historically shaped regional differences still have a significant influence on socio-economic development and the quality of governance. The Polish regions' diverse historical pathways have had a strong impact on the level of social capital and these differences persist.

In both cases, it was noted that strengthening the independence of regional authorities, their election by universal suffrage, and their high degree of financial autonomy, are all conducive to increasing the quality of governance. This was confirmed by local government during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the face of which they put in place self-imposed solutions that helped organise aid, daily-life and the maintenance of sanitary restrictions. It is imperative to point to the positive role of Poland's membership of the EU as a source of laws and regulations that organised streams of support for the regions and their inhabitants. Membership also introduced a specific culture of the local organisation of policy, with transparency in terms of access to, and the spending of, public funds. This is to the benefit of the whole country, as it enables improvements in the quality of institutions, governance and social participation, especially in regions that have a greater tradition of multiculturalism and cooperation with others, which is conducive to building a civil society. Membership also had a positive effect in other cases, but the differences observed point to the importance of social capital (especially in bridging different social groups).

Further support for these processes, utilising cohesion policy programmes targeted directly at the regions and also strengthening their autonomy, may have a positive impact on slowing down the current decline in the quality of governance in the Polish regions but also on improving their socio-economic development.

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