



POLITICAL COMMUNICATION FOCUSED ON INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL DISABILITIES IN GREECE

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Abstract:

Political communication is a fundamental factor for the inclusion of citizens in public and political life. However, individuals with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments, often face barriers in accessing political information and participating equally in the public sphere. This empirical study, which forms part of a doctoral dissertation, explores the attitudes, experiences, and expectations of people with visual impairments in Greece regarding political communication. The research was conducted in September 2025 using a structured questionnaire, distributed to a sample of 81 individuals with visual impairments, employing the snowball sampling method. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA, MANOVA), and principal component analysis (PCA). The results demonstrate a strong interest among individuals with visual impairments in current political affairs, with education positively associated with both the following of such affairs and trust in institutional bodies. Trust in mass media remains limited, while radio and online media are preferred as the primary channels for political information, with variations observed across different age groups. Family and the immediate social environment emerged as key factors influencing political views. Significant barriers include difficulties in exercising voting rights and the absence of targeted policies to ensure equal participation. Additionally, for the development of effective political communication, participants emphasized the need for training party officials, the institutionalization of accessible practices, and the inclusion of individuals with visual impairments in communication teams. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the specific needs of individuals with visual disabilities and provides useful guidance for developing political communication strategies that strengthen equal participation and social inclusion.

Keywords: political communication, visual disability, accessibility, inclusion, political participation

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1. Introduction

Communication between political actors and citizens constitutes a fundamental pillar of the democratic process. According to Dalton (2000), democracy without citizen participation *“lacks both legitimacy and guiding force.”* This empirical study falls within the field of political communication and focuses on strengthening efforts to include citizens with visual disabilities in communication processes and public life, thereby contributing to the expansion of democratic participation and social equality.

Political communication is not a modern phenomenon, yet its forms and mechanisms have undergone radical transformations due to technological progress and the widespread penetration of the internet and social media over the past decade.

The theoretical starting point of this study is the “social model” of disability. Within this framework, political communication, functioning as an agent of socialization, can play a decisive role in promoting social acceptance and respect for individuals with visual impairments. In this way, social justice and equality in the public sphere can be achieved. As noted by Barnes and Mercer (2010), the involvement of persons with disabilities in collective action constitutes a source of empowerment and the development of a positive identity.

When seeking research approaches focused on the development of strategic political communication directed toward individuals with visual disabilities, only a few relevant references emerge. Although this specific scientific field is particularly dynamic, it is addressed in a fragmented and non-targeted manner. Thus, the exploration of this dimension of communication and its incorporation into the literature of the related scientific field is considered both important and necessary.

The primary aim of the study is to highlight the interaction of individuals with visual disabilities with the political environment and, through the identification of their needs and expectations from the communicative process with political actors, to contribute to their equal participation in political information and public life.

More specifically, the study seeks to determine the political interest of individuals with visual disabilities and the current state of political communication in Greece. It aims to identify the most effective and acceptable methods of communicative outreach toward individuals with visual disabilities by political actors, as well as the determining factors that shape these methods. Furthermore, it evaluates the existing barriers within the political communication process and identifies the expectations of individuals with visual disabilities.

This study forms part of a broader research project within the framework of a doctoral dissertation, which aims to develop a strategic communication model for political organizations addressing persons with disabilities.

2. Literature Review

The point of departure for this study is the “social model” of disability, which rejects the earlier “medical model.” The medical perspective held that social restrictions experienced by disabled persons stemmed from their physical impairments. This view was transformed by a radical movement asserting that individuals with impairments become disabled because of the barriers imposed by society that hinder their full participation (Antonopoulou, 2017).

The social model distinguishes between “impairment” and “disability.” The former refers to some form of dysfunction, whereas the latter refers to the restriction that this dysfunction imposes on individuals’ lives because the organizational structure of society has taken little or no measures to accommodate them, ultimately excluding them from social activities.

In the social perspective, the problem of disability is not denied; however, unlike the medical model, responsibility is not placed on the individual. Instead, responsibility is sought within society itself. Disability, therefore, is not caused by individual limitations but by society’s failure to provide appropriate services that respond to disabled persons’ needs. This failure does not have random effects on individuals but systemic consequences on disabled persons as a group, who experience this failure as institutionalized discrimination across the social spectrum. Thus, the way society approaches disability constructs disability itself and places disabled persons in a marginalized position of dependency, poverty, unemployment, and denial of equal citizenship rights (Zoniou-Sideri, 2004).

As Oliver (1996) notes, when individuals with disabilities encounter the social model, the experience is often revelatory and simultaneously liberating, as it allows them—perhaps for the first time—to understand that most difficulties in their lives are produced by society itself.

Political communication, as an agent of socialization, can contribute to the broader adoption of the social model of disability.

Political communication is defined as the dynamically evolving field that focuses on the ways political actors, the media and citizens exchange information, form attitudes and jointly shape the political agenda (Blumler & Cushion, 2014). In recent years, research in political communication has shifted toward studying the inclusion and representation of social groups traditionally marginalized from the public sphere, such as individuals with disabilities (Scammell, 2014; Vromen et al., 2015).

Schuler (cited in Demertzis, 2002) argues that the proliferation of digital communities and broader use of new technologies in political processes increases citizen participation, enhances their understanding and monitoring of political agendas at national and especially local levels, and promotes egalitarianism and freedom of expression.

Political communication is a powerful tool for promoting the socialization and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in public life. When properly developed, governments, organizations, and political actors can highlight disability-related issues,

promote rights and help eliminate social, economic and political barriers that restrict them. Simultaneously, it plays a crucial role in informing the broader public about the needs and rights of individuals with disabilities and in sensitizing society, helping to dismantle stereotypes and prejudices (Ellis & Goggin, 2015).

Through political communication, positive role models of individuals with disabilities who actively participate in society, politics, sports or other fields may be highlighted. Such representation enhances the image of individuals with disabilities as full and active members of society and demonstrates their ability to contribute meaningfully to public life (Pruitt & VanPuymbrouck, 2021). In parallel, the participation of individuals with disabilities in political dialogue is essential for their full integration into society. Political communication can ensure that their voices are heard—through organizations or through increased participation in elections, consultations and public discussions (Priestley et al., 2019).

Thus, an inclusive culture can be developed across all levels of society, promoting equality in employment, education, health, and social life, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are not subjected to discrimination or marginalization.

In conclusion, political communication can play a central role in shaping a society that is not only more sensitized to disability-related issues but also more receptive and inclusive. By harnessing the potential of political communication, individuals with disabilities can be motivated to participate fully in public life and achieve equal rights and opportunities across all domains of social life (Priestley et al., 2019).

Through the present empirical study, citizens with visual disabilities, by participating in the research process, gain a platform to record their views and advance their claims for equality and inclusion in political action. On their part, political organizations acquire a valuable tool for use, as the collected data assist them in developing an effective framework for communication and information dissemination with the examined audience.

Thus, the study could contribute to the development of a broader public dialogue concerning the phenomenon of communicative outreach to individuals with visual disabilities and support the consolidation of the social model of disability management.

3. Material and Methods

The primary research was conducted through a structured questionnaire addressed to individuals with visual disabilities, aged over 18, residing within Greek territory. The empirical research was conducted in September 2025.

A total of 81 individuals with visual disabilities participated in the study. Data collection was carried out using the snowball sampling method, whereby each participant was asked to recommend additional potential respondents. This method was selected due to the absence of an available sampling frame for this specific population and the inherent difficulties in locating individuals with visual disabilities (Chalikias, Manolesou & Lalos, 2015, p. 40).

Such potentially inaccessible populations, as is the case with individuals with visual disabilities, may be few in number, geographically dispersed, unregistered or difficult to identify, feel stigmatized and/or desire anonymity, be particularly sensitive and vulnerable, and require a certain degree of trust in order to become willing participants (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019).

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through the Google Forms platform, which provides full accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Statistical data analysis was conducted using the R programming language, which offers advanced tools for statistical computation and data visualization (R Core Team, 2024).

Initially, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, followed by a focused analysis of the questionnaire items with respect to the independent variables “age group” and “educational level.” Specifically, univariate and multivariate analyses of variance (ANOVA and MANOVA) and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) were performed to assess differences in respondents’ answers based on the aforementioned independent variables.

The questionnaire was anonymous, in line with the confidentiality requirements of the study and the protection of the sensitive personal data that participants were asked to provide.

3.1 Assumptions and Limitations

Within the context of this study, it is assumed that participants answered all questionnaire items with honesty and understanding, accurately reflecting their personal views and attitudes on the issues examined.

During the conduct of the research, difficulty was observed in locating participants meeting the criteria set by the study, an issue that was mitigated through the use of the snowball sampling method. Additionally, the nationwide dissemination of the questionnaire was facilitated by the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities, the National Federation of the Blind, and the respective Regional Associations and Societies of persons with visual disabilities, which contributed to overcoming this challenge.

The involvement of politics in the subject under investigation acted as a deterrent for some potential participants from taking part in the study, despite the fact that the purpose of the research was not to capture their political opinions and positions, as clearly stated in the accompanying letter of the questionnaire.

Finally, the geographic dispersion of the questionnaires and responses exclusively within Greek territory may be considered a limitation regarding the geographic transferability of the findings; nevertheless, these findings remain a significant foundation for further expansion and scientific investigation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographics

Among the 81 individuals with visual disabilities who participated in the study, 57% were men and 43% were women. Age distribution was as follows: 12% aged 18–24, 24% aged 25–34, 15% aged 35–44, 21% aged 45–54, 11% aged 55–64, and 17% aged 65+.

Among the participants, 49% are high school graduates and 30% hold university degrees, while 11% have basic education and 10% possess a postgraduate qualification. Regarding geographic distribution, the largest participation came from Athens (39%), while the dissemination of the questionnaire through the Regional Associations of persons with visual disabilities contributed to significant representation from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas across the country. Specifically, 10% of the participants were from Thessaloniki, 31% reported residing in urban areas, 10% in semi-urban areas, and the remaining 10% in rural areas.

4.2 Political Interest, Engagement and Trust in Institutions

In the first section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to respond regarding their interest in politics, their involvement in it, as well as their level of trust in institutions.

As indicated, 54% of participants showed above-average interest in following current political affairs. Specifically, 28% responded “Very much,” 26% “Quite a lot,” 25% “Moderately,” 15% “A little,” and 6% “Not at all.” The level of interest decreases when the question focuses on specific political parties and political figures.

Notably, when asked whether participants follow the political activities of a particular party closely, 13% answered “Very much,” 15% “Quite a lot,” 21% “Moderately,” 15% “A little,” and 36% “Not at all.” At the level of political figures, 5% responded “Very much,” 11% “Quite a lot,” 10% “Moderately,” 18% “A little,” and 56% “Not at all.”

Analyzing the quantitative variable for following political news according to the qualitative variable of educational level (Figure 1), the latter significantly influences participants’ responses ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, the higher the participant’s educational level, the greater the likelihood of following political developments in our country.

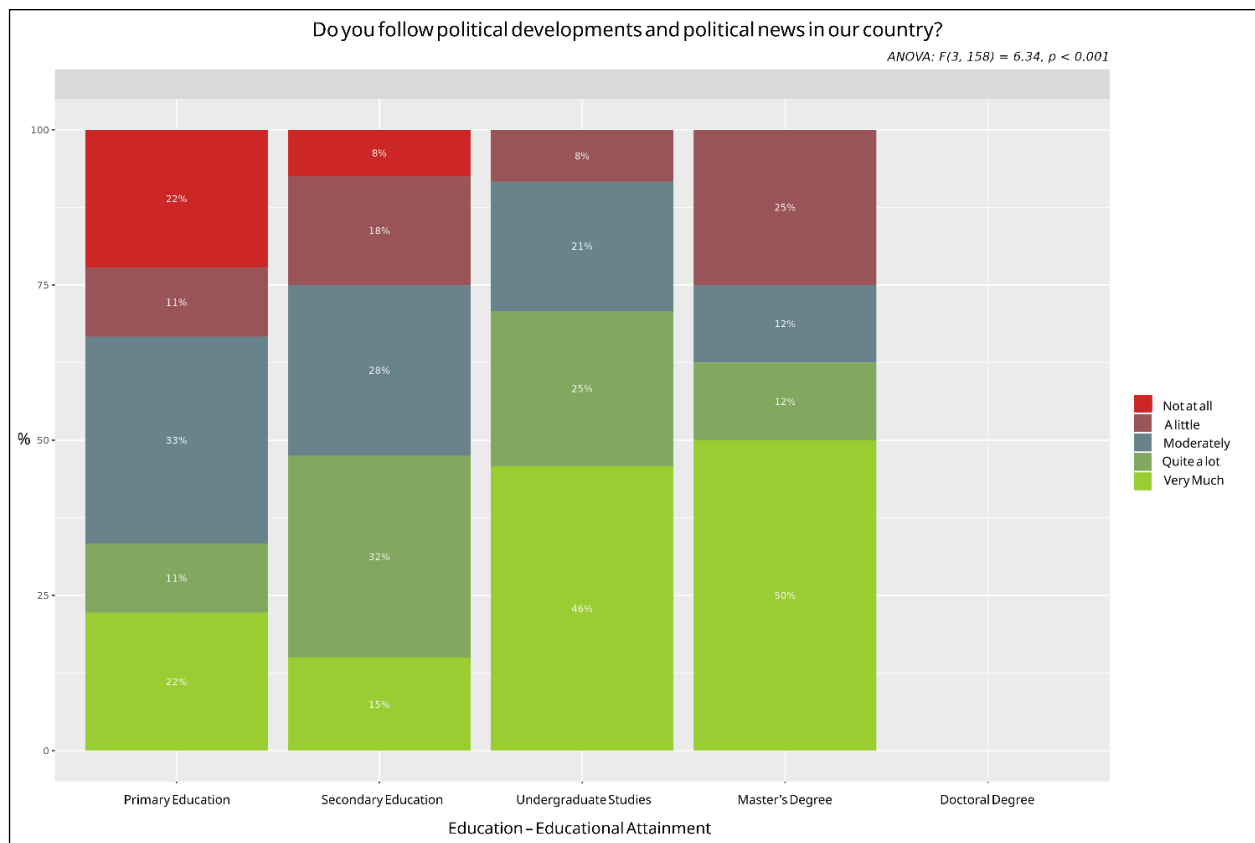


Figure 1: Do you follow political developments and political news in our country? – by Educational level

Participants appear dissatisfied with the functioning of the political system regarding issues affecting individuals with visual disabilities in Greece, with only 1% reporting being “Quite” satisfied, while 27% responded “Moderately,” 27% “A little,” and 45% “Not at all.”

This perception is reflected in their responses concerning the level of trust in specific bodies and institutions (Figure 2). Negative opinions predominate, with the government receiving the highest proportion of such views.

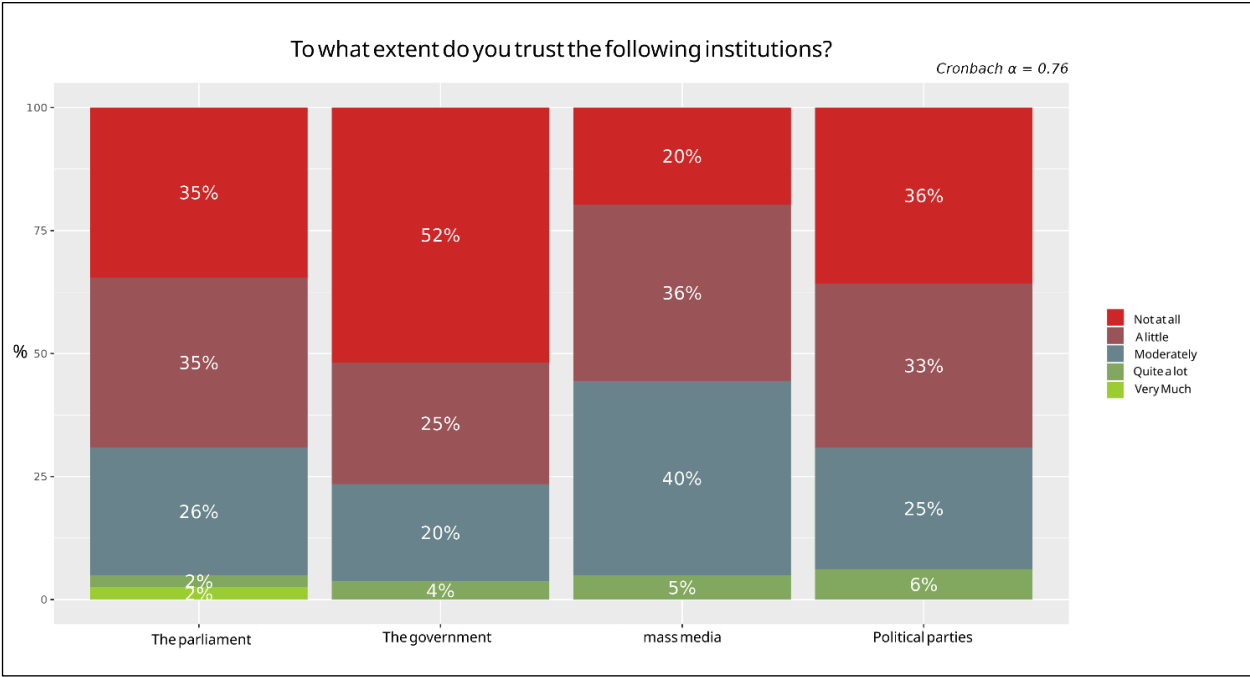


Figure 2: To what extent do you trust the following institutions?

In this specific question, component analysis was conducted in order to identify precise differences (Figure 3).

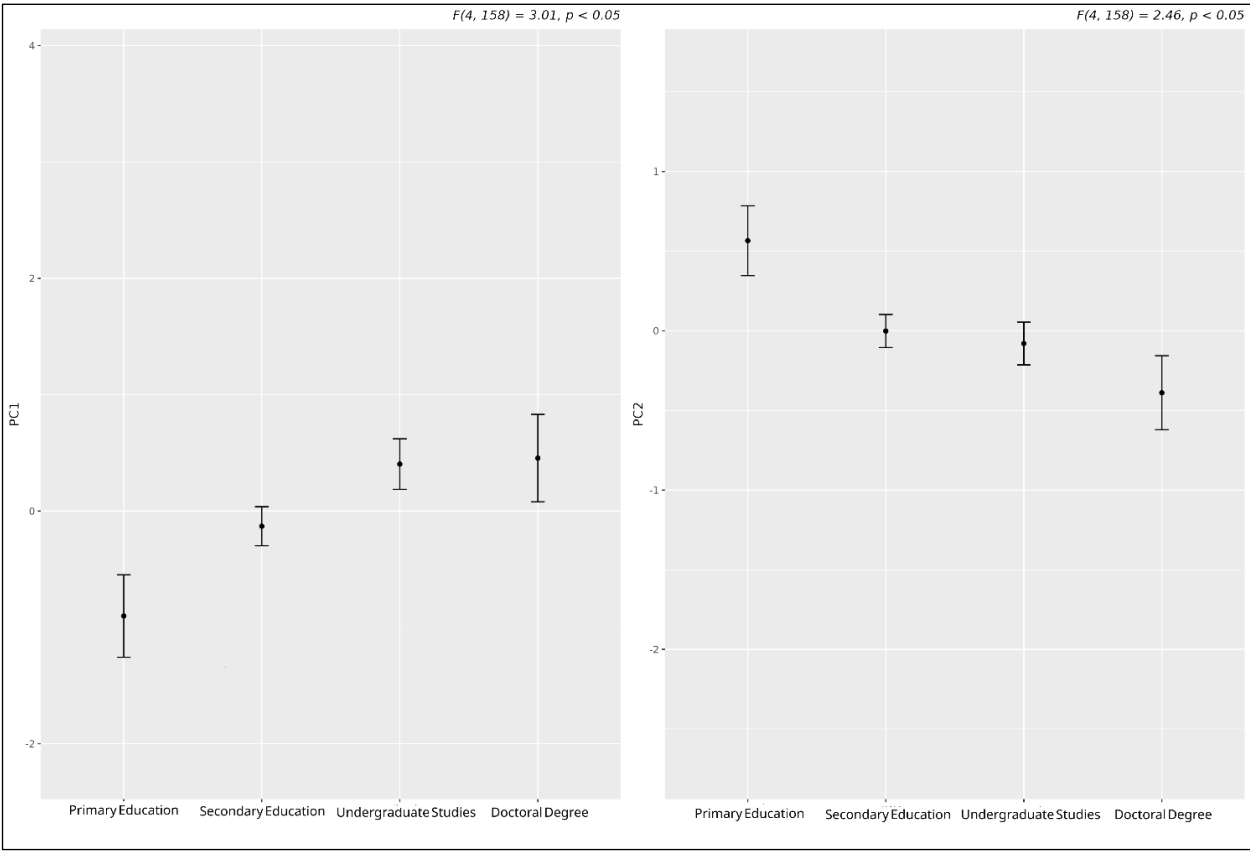


Figure 3: To what extent do you trust the following institutions? - by Education level

Specifically, the entities evaluated by the respondents were divided into two groups: PC1 comprising political parties (officials, etc.), the government (ministers/deputy ministers), and the parliament (members of parliament), and PC2 comprising the mass media.

The examination of PC1 yielded a statistically significant result ($p < 0.05$), indicating that as educational level increases, a higher degree of trust is observed toward the entities under study. Similarly, the analysis of PC2 also revealed a statistically significant result ($p < 0.05$), with the difference that as educational level increases, the degree of trust in the mass media decreases.

Nevertheless, individuals with visual disabilities express a significant degree of desire for political engagement through specific actions (Figure 4). Their top preference is participation in the next electoral process as voters (38% responded “Very much,” 21% “Quite a lot,” 11% “Moderately,” 8% “A little,” and 22% “Not at all”), followed by participation through submitting proposals on issues of open consultation (opengov) (14% responded “Very much,” 31% “Quite a lot,” 18% “Moderately,” 21% “A little,” and 16% “Not at all”).

In stark contrast are the results regarding participation as a candidate in a political party, active support of the communication efforts of a politician or party, and attendance at political events.

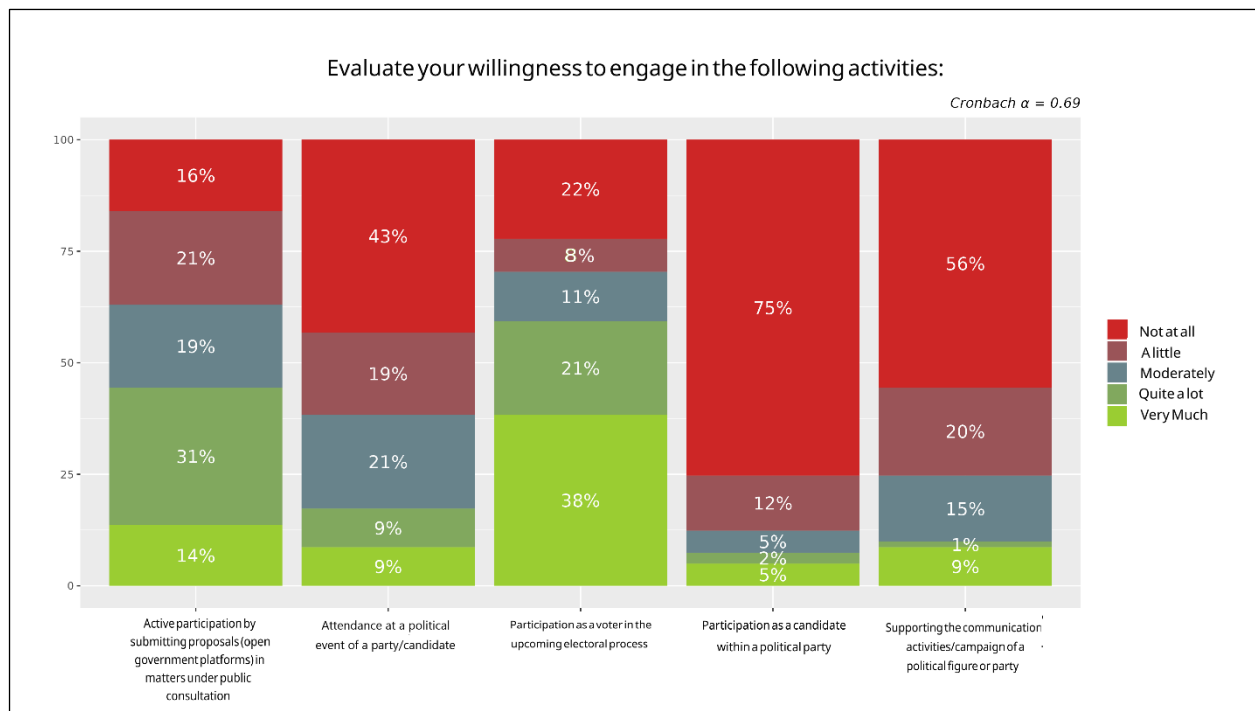


Figure 4: Evaluate your willingness to engage in the following activities

4.3 Political Information: Media, Barriers, Expectations

In the effort to develop a communication strategy, a crucial factor is the recognition of the extent to which the perceptions and positions of the target group are influenced by specific population groups (Figure 5). It is observed that the family and social

environment exerts the greatest influence on individuals with visual disabilities (1% responded “Very much,” 15% “Quite a lot,” 23% “Moderately,” 19% “A little,” and 42% “Not at all”). To a lesser extent, political parties and candidates, support staff and caregivers, digital peers (social media/chat rooms), mass media/journalists, and prominent athletes/sports personalities have an impact.

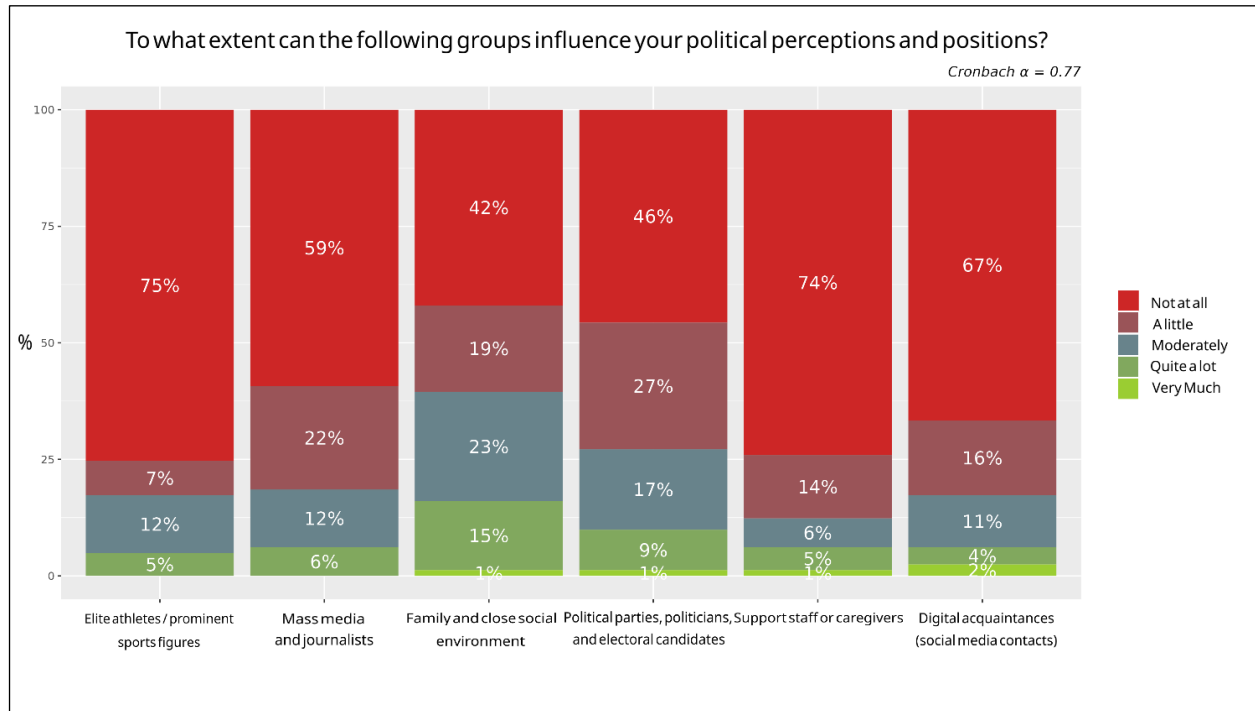


Figure 5: To what extent can the following groups influence your political perceptions and positions?

The choice of communication medium acquires particular significance in the effort to reach individuals with visual disabilities, as it determines the degree of accessibility of the information.

Participants in the study were asked to indicate the extent to which they use electronic and online media for their political information (Figure 6). As shown in the corresponding chart, news websites on the internet hold the highest preference, followed by radio, with social networks and television coming next.

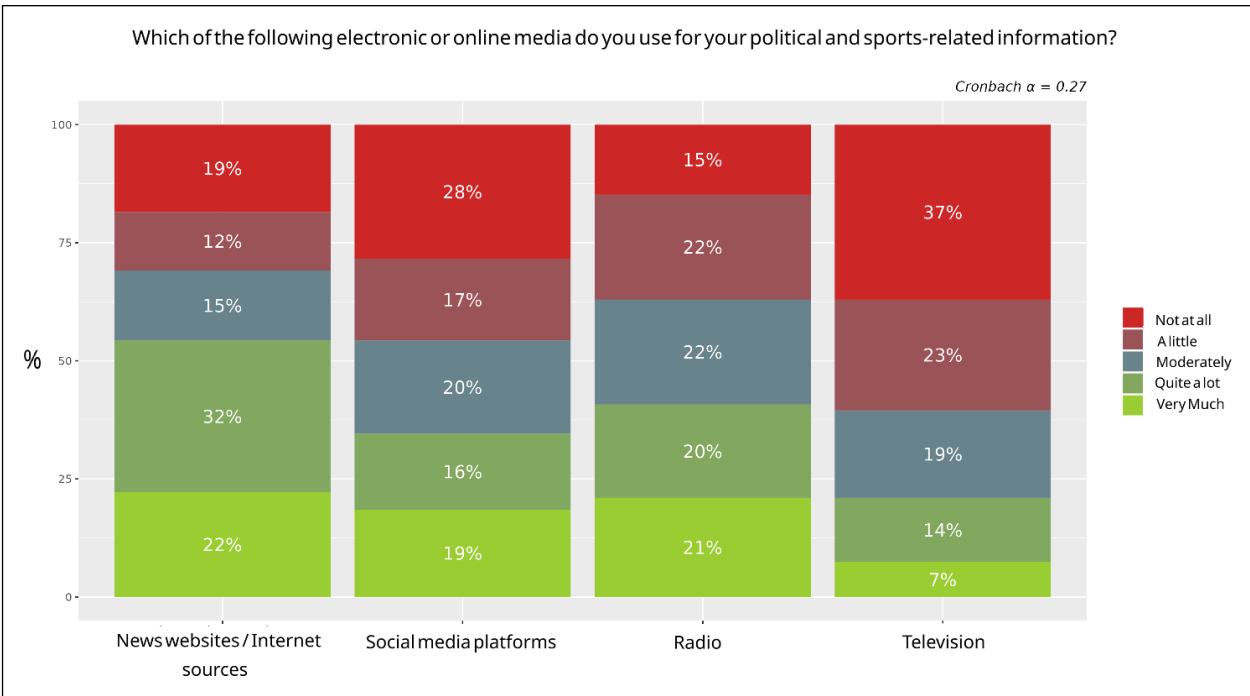


Figure 6: Which of the following electronic or online media do you use for your political and sports-related information?

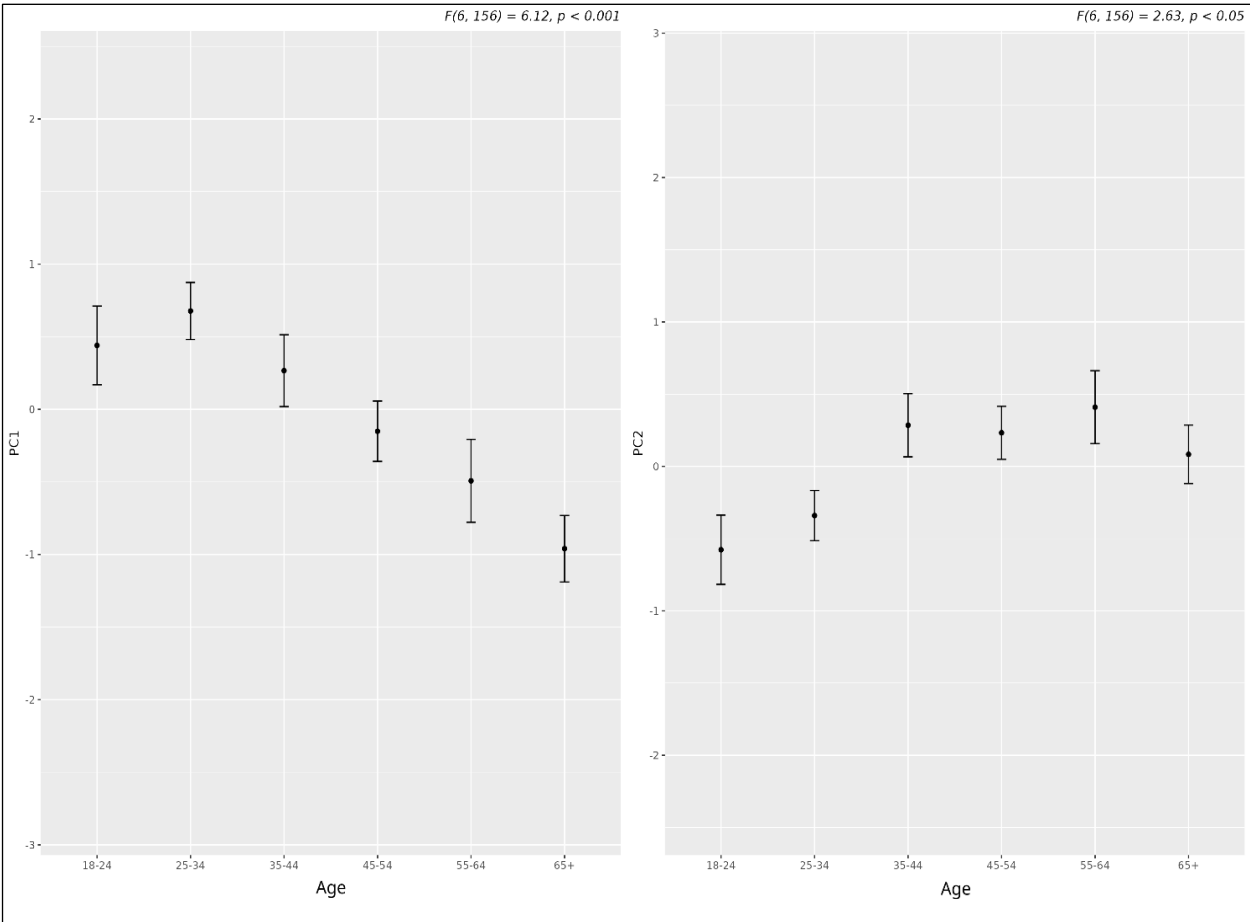


Figure 7: Which of the following electronic or online media do you use for your political and sports-related information? - by Age

The MANOVA analysis (Figure 7) on the same question yielded statistically significant results ($p < 0.001$) based on both the age and educational level of the participants. To identify the precise differences, principal component analysis (PCA) was also employed, where PC1 comprised news websites – Internet, social networks, and PC2 comprised television and radio. The findings indicate that digital media are more widely accepted among younger age groups, whereas electronic media (radio, television) are preferred by older participants. Furthermore, it is confirmed that as educational level increases, acceptance of both electronic and online media for information also increases (Figure 8).

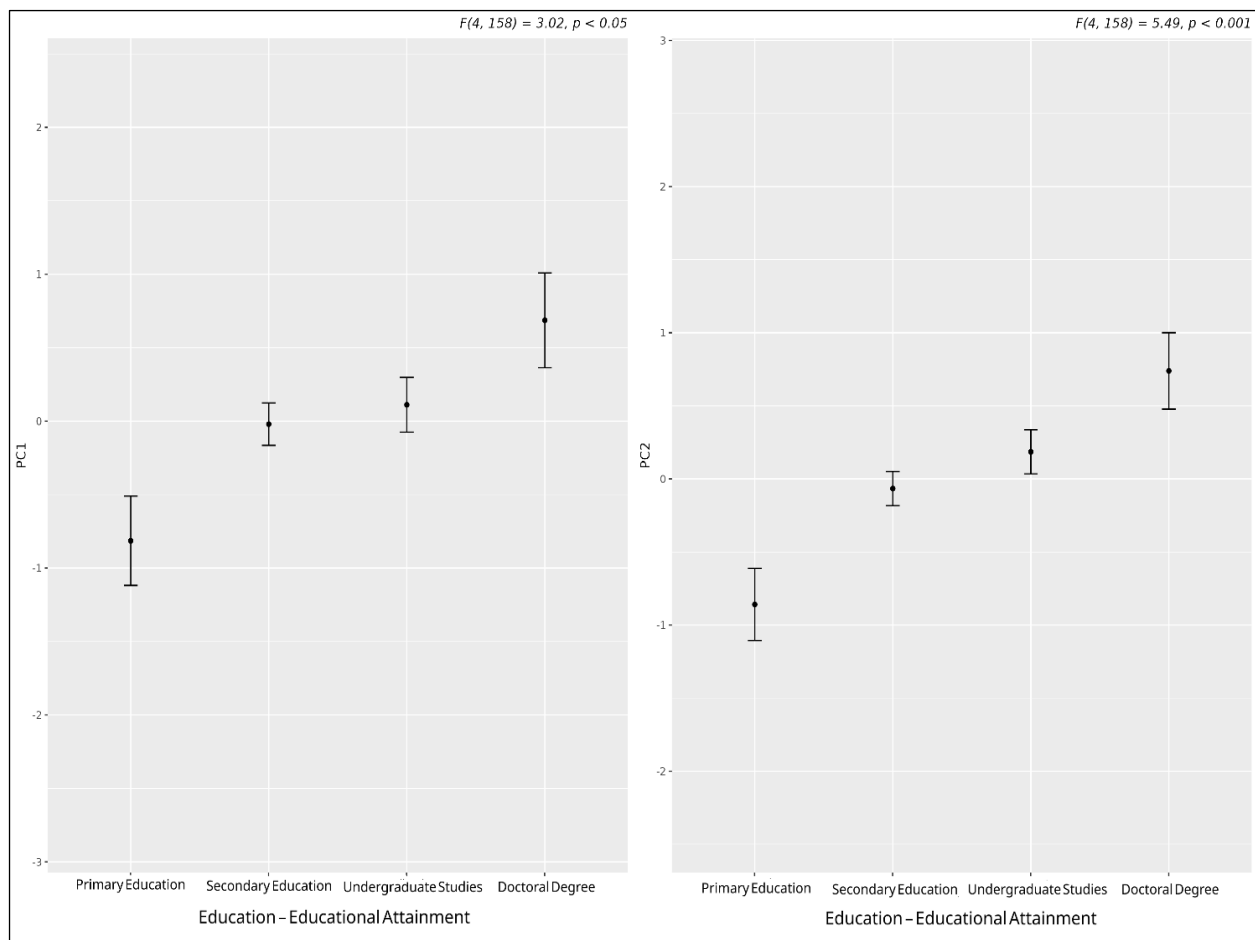


Figure 8: Which of the following electronic or online media do you use for your political and sports-related information? - by Education level

Focusing more specifically on channels of information transmission, participants were asked to assess various electronic and online communication media regarding their effectiveness in facilitating communication between political actors and individuals with visual disabilities (Figure 9).

The responses revealed that radio, social networks, telephone, and internet websites received the highest levels of acceptance as the most preferred communication modes, whereas television and text messaging were considered less favorable options.

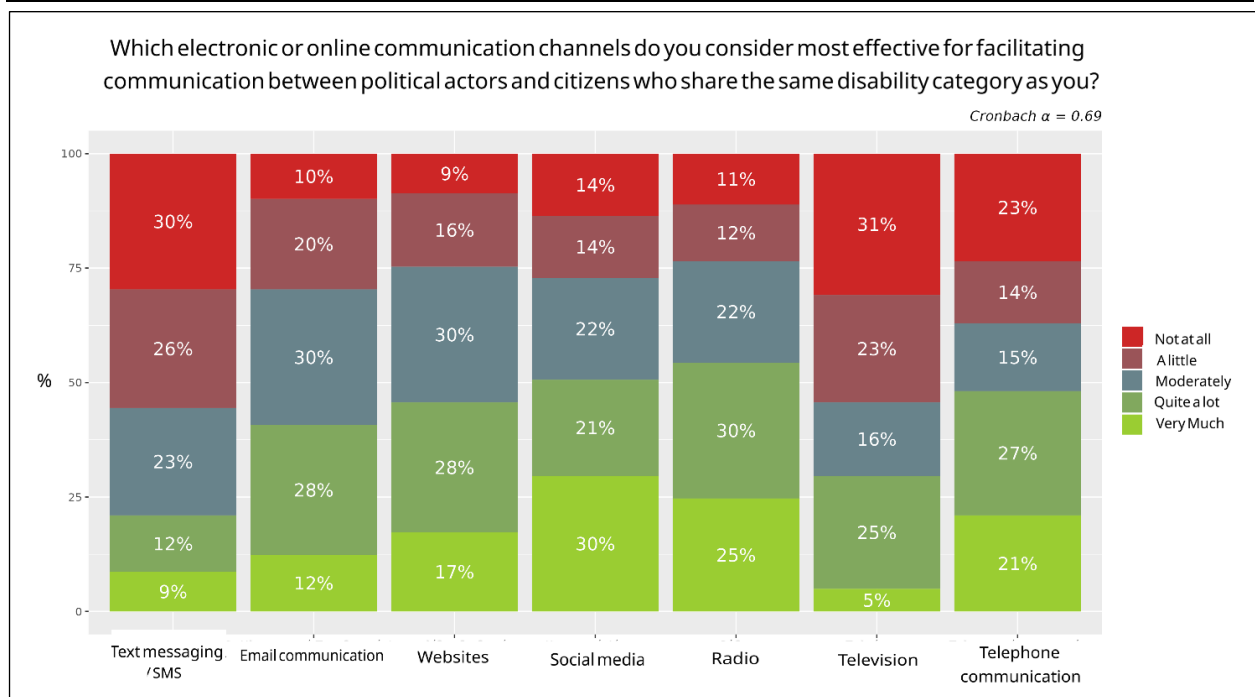


Figure 9: Which electronic or online communication channels do you consider most effective for facilitating communication between political actors and citizens who share the same disability category as you?

Next, participants were presented with specific barriers identified in the literature, with the aim of evaluating their impact on the provision and development of political information for individuals with visual disabilities (Figure 10). Among the barriers presented, the highest levels of agreement were observed for the “difficulties faced by individuals with visual disabilities in accessing the electoral process during the exercise of voting rights” (57% affirmative responses) and the “lack of targeted, feasible policies by political parties for bilateral political communication with individuals with visual disabilities” (56% affirmative responses).

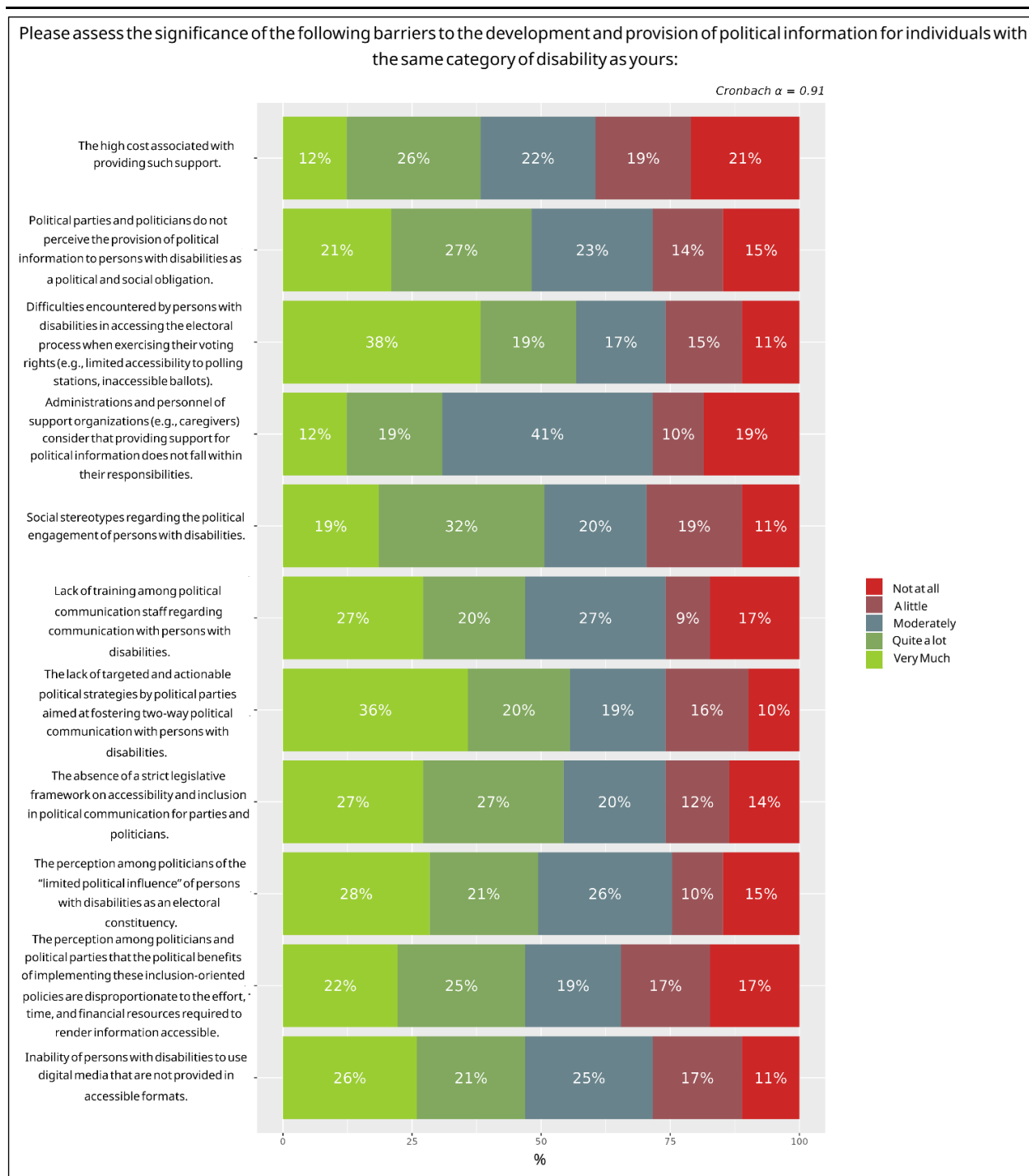


Figure 10: Assess the significance of the following barriers to the development and provision of political information for individuals with the same category of disability as yours

To achieve their expectations, participants were asked to evaluate the importance of specific proposals in shaping effective political communication and interaction between parties/political figures and individuals with visual disabilities (Figure 11).

The proposal that received the highest level of acceptance was the provision of "Counseling and technical training programs for politicians and party officials" (38% responded "Very much," 31% "Quite," 17% "Moderately," 9% "A little," and 5% "Not at all"). Following, in order of decreasing acceptance, were the proposals for "Legislation

and implementation of a relevant organizational framework,” “Participation of individuals with visual disabilities in the communication teams of political parties,” and “State funding to politicians for the use of modern communication equipment with individuals with visual disabilities.”

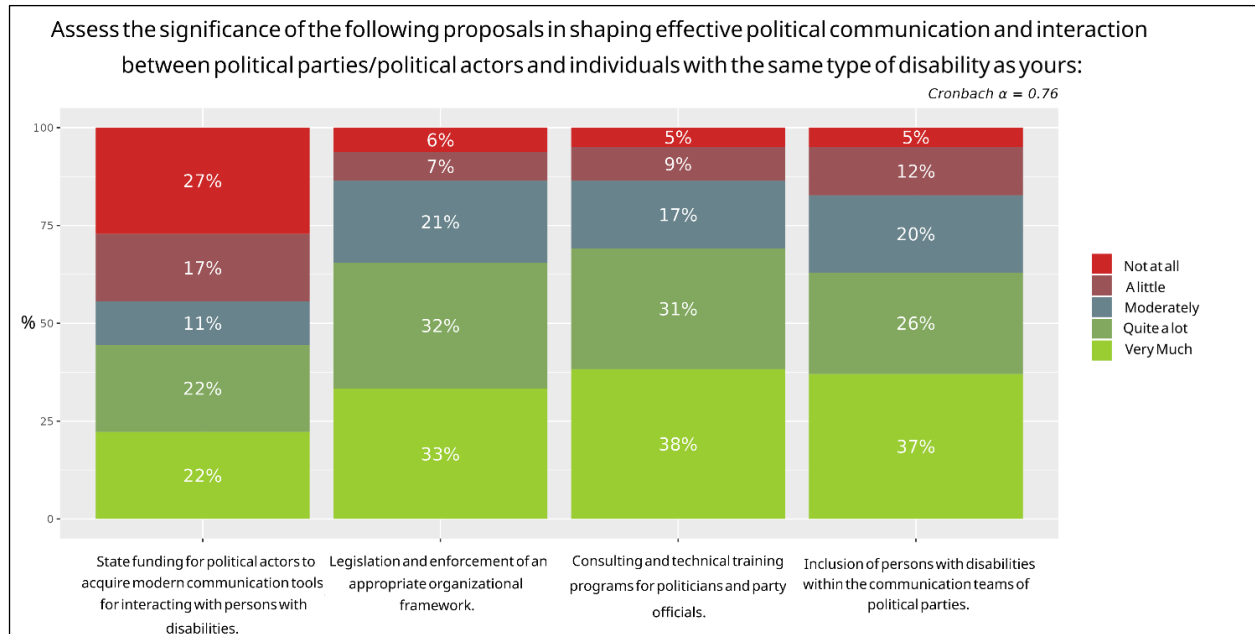


Figure 11: Assess the significance of the following proposals in shaping effective political communication and interaction between political parties/political actors and individuals with the same type of disability as yours

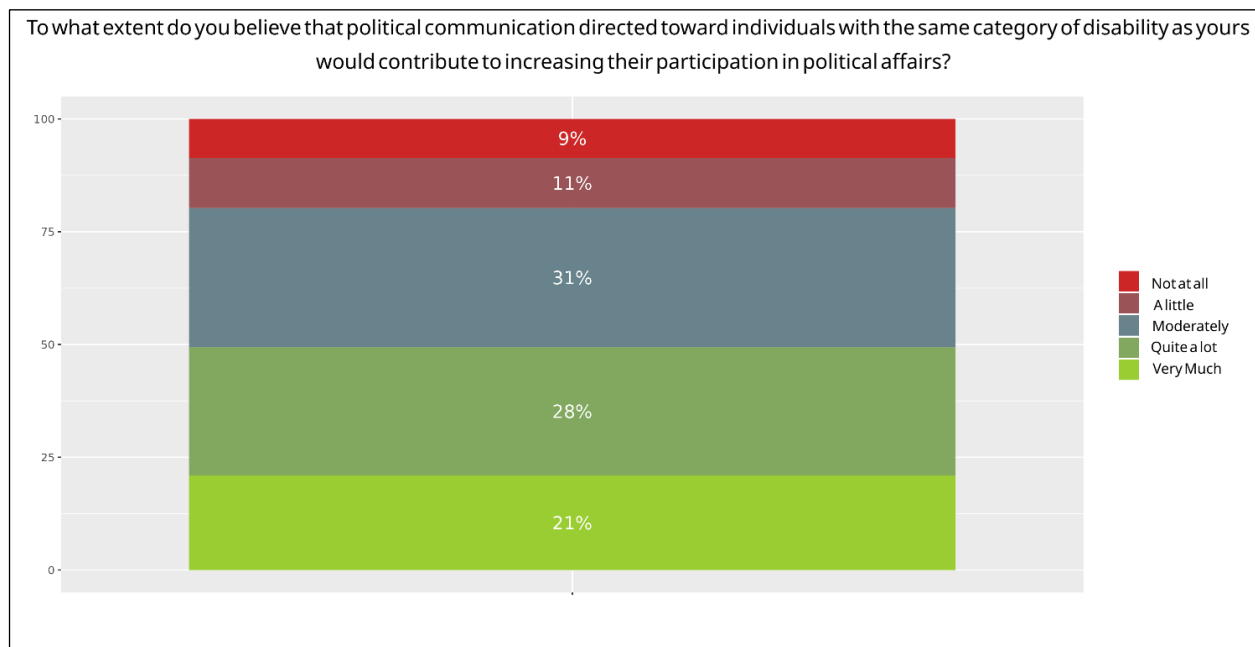


Figure 12: To what extent do you believe that political communication directed toward individuals with the same category of disability as yours would contribute to increasing their participation in political affairs?

Concluding the presentation of the empirical research results, a large percentage of participants express confidence that political communication directed towards individuals with visual disabilities can contribute to increasing their participation in political affairs (Figure 12). Specifically, 21% consider this “Very likely,” 28% “Quite likely,” 31% “Moderately likely,” 11% “A little likely,” and 9% “Not at all likely.”

5. Discussion

The analysis of the empirical study data highlights the strong interest of individuals with visual disabilities in Greece regarding current political affairs, despite the significant accessibility barriers they face in political life. The finding that educational level is positively correlated with the monitoring of political developments, as well as with trust in institutional bodies, aligns with international research that identifies education as a critical factor in political empowerment (Schur et al., 2017). Simultaneously, the diminished trust in the media reflects broader trends of skepticism observed in the general population (Norris, 2011), yet it acquires particular significance when concerning an already marginalized social group.

Taking into account the distinct characteristics of individuals with visual disabilities and the corresponding accessibility features offered by communication media, participants showed a marked preference for online media and radio as sources of political information. The variation by age group confirms the role of technological familiarity, with younger generations gravitating more toward digital channels. This finding is crucial for the design of communication strategies, as it suggests that political organizations must tailor their messages to different media according to the audience they address.

Moreover, the prominence of family and immediate social environment as significant influencers of political perceptions and positions underscores the role of interpersonal networks in political socialization. This finding indicates that political communication toward individuals with visual disabilities cannot be confined to informational channels alone but must include community empowerment actions and the cultivation of an inclusive culture.

The identified barriers, such as difficulties in exercising the right to vote and the lack of targeted policies, are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes that institutional inertia and the absence of accessibility lead to political exclusion (Priestley et al., 2019; Shakespeare, 2018). In the direction of changing the current situation, the strong desire expressed by participants for feasible policy interventions—such as training party officials and including persons with disabilities in communication teams—highlights the importance of inclusive political practice not only as a theoretical goal but also as a practical necessity.

In conclusion, the findings reinforce the view that political communication can function as a tool for empowerment and social inclusion, provided it is designed based on the specific needs and expectations of individuals with visual disabilities.

5.1 Recommendations

Despite its limitations, this study offers a substantive contribution to the literature on political communication and disability, laying the groundwork for the development of more targeted and effective communication strategies in the future.

In this direction, it is recommended to strengthen the empirical findings through the implementation of qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews with political personnel, communication professionals), a process that would contribute to triangulating the study's results and enhancing the validity of the conclusions.

Finally, it is proposed that similar studies be conducted across other disability categories as well as in other countries to allow for comparative analysis of the findings and to broaden the scope of investigation.

6. Conclusion

The empirical study clearly demonstrated that individuals with visual disabilities exhibit a strong interest in political developments but face significant barriers in accessing political information and participation.

Key factors in efforts to include them are education, the selection of appropriate communication channels, and the assurance of accessible procedures. Conversely, low levels of trust toward institutions and the media underscore the need for targeted policies that will build relationships of trust and transparency.

In the direction of developing effective political communication, the incorporation of the demands and proposals of individuals with visual disabilities themselves—such as the training of political personnel and the institutionalization of accessible practices—can play a decisive role in removing barriers and shaping an inclusive democracy.

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