



POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND INDIVIDUALS WITH MOBILITY DISABILITIES IN GREECE

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Abstract:

Political communication constitutes a decisive factor in shaping democratic societies and ensuring the participation of all citizens in public and political life. However, persons with disabilities—and in particular those with mobility disabilities—continue to face significant barriers in accessing political information and in participating equally in the public sphere. This empirical study, which forms part of a doctoral dissertation dedicated to the development of a communication model of political communication targeting individuals with disabilities, investigates the attitudes, experiences and expectations of persons with mobility disabilities in Greece regarding their participation in political affairs. The research was conducted in October 2025 via a structured questionnaire distributed to a sample of 80 individuals with mobility disabilities using the snowball sampling method. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA, MANOVA), and Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The findings reveal a high level of interest in current political affairs among individuals with mobility disabilities. At the same time, low trust toward traditional mass media was observed, accompanied by a clear preference for digital and online media as the dominant channels of political information. Family and immediate social environments function as the primary sources of political influence, while significant obstacles were identified in the exercise of voting rights and in the existence of institutional policies that promote accessibility and inclusive participation. Additionally, participants underscored the need for training political party officials, establishing institutional guarantees for accessible practices, and integrating individuals with disabilities into communication teams. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the specific needs of individuals with mobility disabilities and provides useful guidance for developing political communication strategies that strengthen equal participation and social inclusion.

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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 mobility 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, according to which disability does not result from personal deficits or impairments, but from societal barriers that exclude individuals with disabilities from participating in public life (Oliver, 1990).

Within this framework, political communication, as a mechanism of socialization, can play a decisive role in promoting social acceptance and respect toward persons with mobility disabilities. As Barnes and Mercer (2010) note, the involvement of disabled individuals in collective action constitutes a source of empowerment and the development of a positive identity.

Despite the importance of this issue, both international and domestic literature present limited research approaches focusing on the development of political communication strategies specifically tailored to the needs of persons with mobility disabilities. Consequently, a systematic exploration of this dimension becomes necessary in order to strengthen scientific evidence and generate practical tools for inclusive policy-making.

The primary aim of the study is to highlight the interaction of individuals with mobility disabilities with the political environment and, by identifying 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 persons with mobility disabilities and the current state of political communication in Greece. It aims to identify the most effective and acceptable methods of communicative outreach toward persons with mobility disabilities by political actors, as well as the determining factors shaping these methods. Furthermore, it evaluates the existing barriers within the political communication process and identifies the expectations of individuals with mobility disabilities.

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

based on the principles of the social model and accessibility to information. This model seeks to provide a theoretical and practical framework for integrating disability as a central element within democratic communication strategies.

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., 2014).

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 (Shakespeare, 2017). 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 encouraged to participate fully in public life and to achieve equal rights and opportunities across all spheres of social life (Priestley et al., 2019).

Through the present empirical study, individuals with mobility disabilities take an active role in the research process, expressing their experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding political communication. Their participation strengthens their voice in the public sphere and contributes to highlighting their demands for equality, accessibility, and meaningful inclusion in political action. On the other hand, political organizations gain a valuable strategic planning tool, as the empirical data collected enable them to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs and preferences of this specific audience and to develop more effective and accessible communication strategies.

3. Material and Methods

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

A total of 80 individuals with mobility 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 mobility disabilities (Chalikias, Manolesou & Lalos, 2015, p. 40).

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 in relation to the independent variable “educational level.” Specifically, univariate and multivariate analyses of variance (ANOVA and MANOVA) were performed, along with a Principal Component Analysis (PCA).

The questionnaire was anonymous, ensuring the protection of participants’ personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679 – GDPR). All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided their explicit consent prior to participation.

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 data collection, locating participants with the required characteristics proved challenging. This limitation was partly mitigated through the snowball sampling method. The dissemination of the questionnaire was supported by national and regional disability associations, aiding representation of different geographical areas.

The political nature of the research topic discouraged some potential participants, even though the questionnaire clearly stated that the study did not aim to record political beliefs or ideological positions.

Finally, the geographical focus on Greece may limit the generalizability of findings to other contexts; however, the results provide an important foundation for further theoretical and empirical advancement in political communication and disability studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographics

Among the 80 individuals with mobility disabilities who participated in the study, 72% were men and 28% were women. Age distribution was as follows: 3% aged 18–24, 5% aged 25–34, 35% aged 35–44, 30% aged 45–54, 25% aged 55–64, and 2% aged 65+.

Regarding educational attainment, 12% had basic education, 25% were high school graduates, 40% held a university degree, 15% held a Master’s degree, and 8% held a Doctorate.

In terms of geographical distribution, the largest representation came from urban areas (55%). The dissemination of the questionnaire through regional associations

contributed to strong representation of semi-urban and rural areas. Specifically, 13% resided in Athens, 8% in Thessaloniki, 12% in semi-urban areas, and 12% in rural regions.

4.2 Political Interest, Engagement and Trust in Institutions

Participants reported significant interest in current political affairs. Specifically, 60% expressed above-average interest: 28% "Very much," 32% "Quite a lot," 22% "Moderately," 13% "A little," and 5% "Not at all." Interest decreased when questions focused specifically on political parties or political figures.

Monitoring of a particular political party was reported by: 18% "Very much," 25% "Quite a lot," 12% "Moderately," 20% "A little," and 25% "Not at all." Monitoring of political figures was lower. At the level of political figures, 13% responded "Very much," 10% "Quite a lot," 30% "Moderately," 15% "A little," and 32% "Not at all."

Educational level significantly affected political news consumption ($p < 0.001$), with higher levels associated with increased likelihood of following political developments (Figure 1).

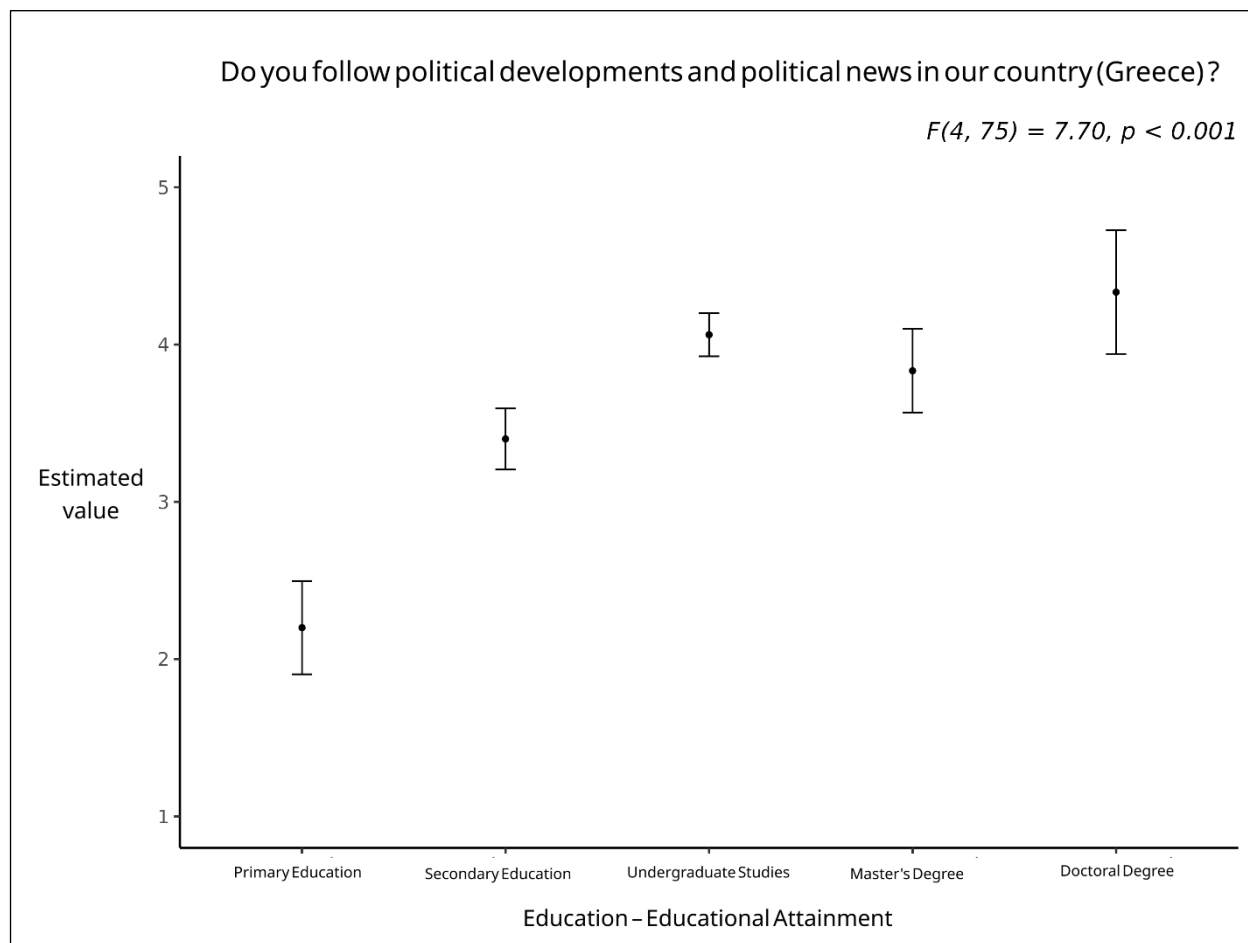


Figure 1: Do you follow political developments and political news in our country?

Satisfaction with the political system regarding disability issues was low: 2% "Quite satisfied," 20% "Moderately," 28% "A little," and 50% "Not at all."

Their view is reflected in their responses regarding the degree of trust they place in specific bodies and institutions. Thus, negative opinions prevail, with the highest proportion directed toward the Government and political parties (Figure 2).

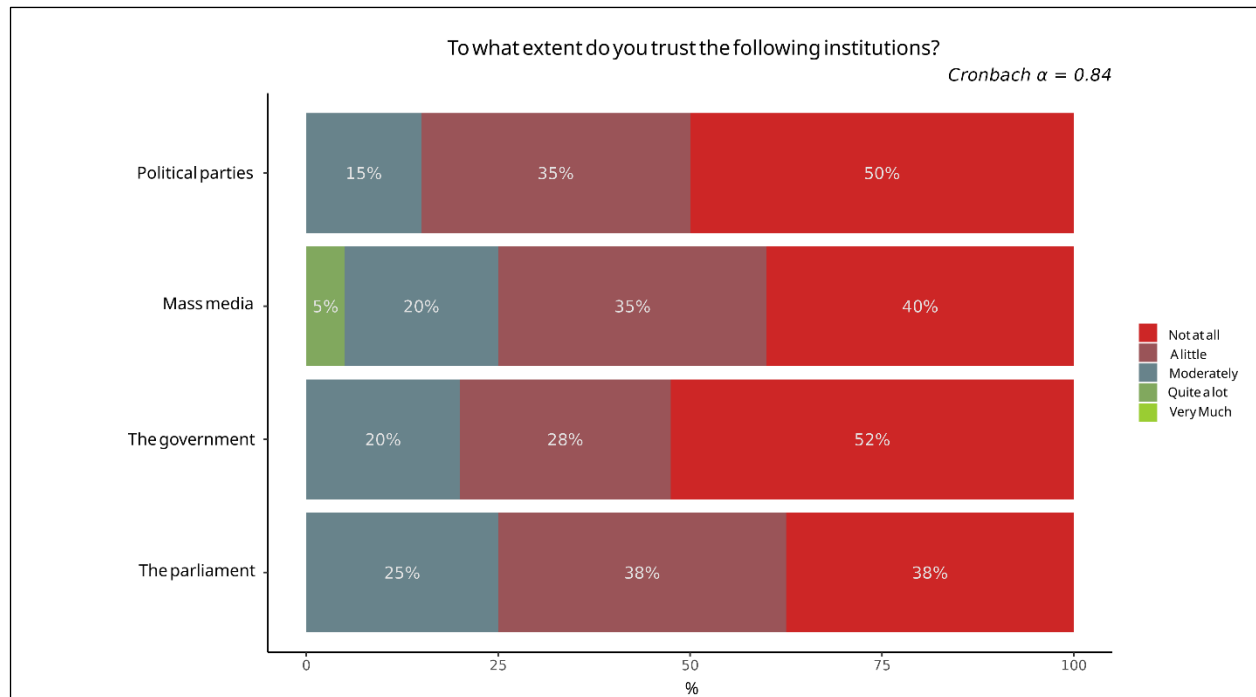


Figure 2: To what extent do you trust the following institutions?

4.3 Political Participation Intentions

Despite distrust, participants expressed significant willingness to engage politically (Figure 3). Submitting proposals through public consultations (opengov) was the most preferred form of engagement: 22% “Very much,” 28% “Quite a lot,” 20% “Moderately,” 18% “A little,” 12% “Not at all.” Intent to vote in upcoming elections was also high. In contrast, 75% expressed negative attitudes toward candidacy, supporting communication efforts of politicians, or attending political events.

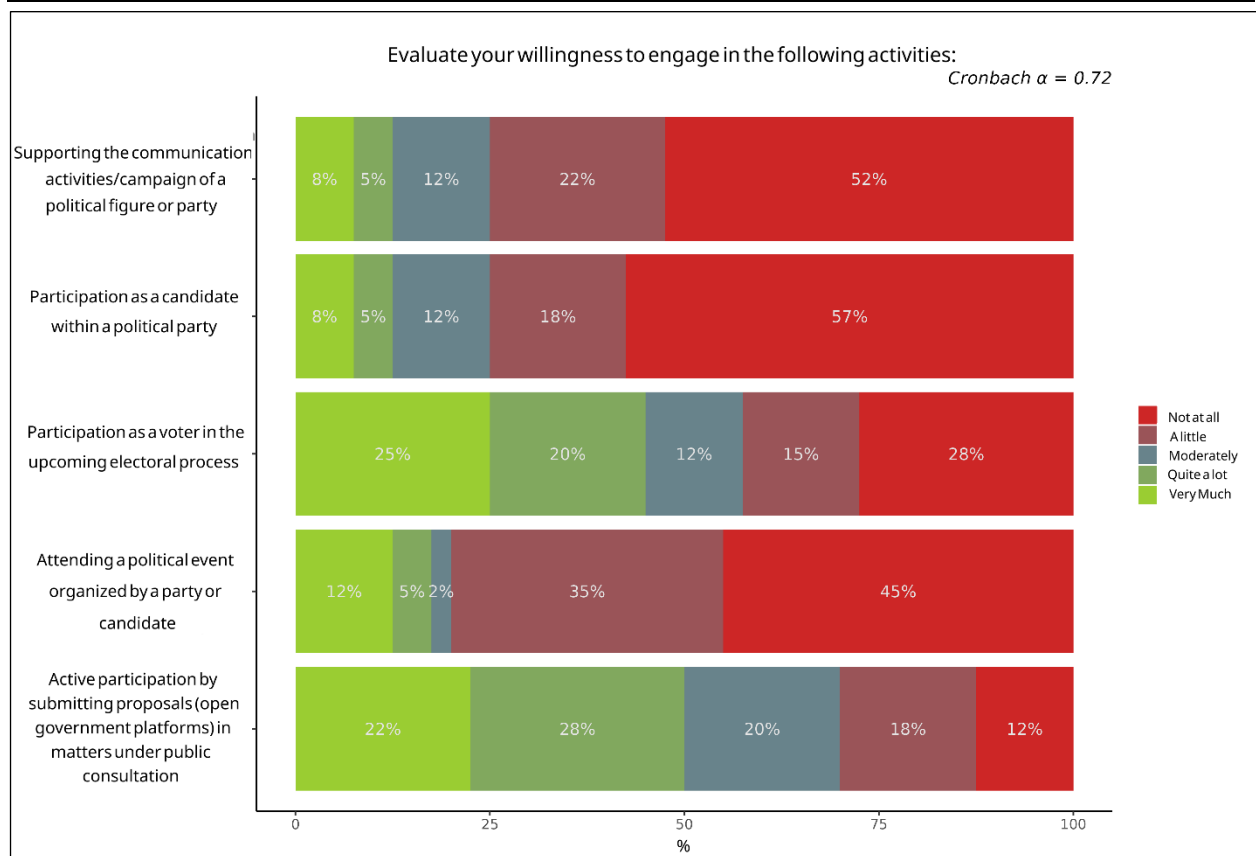


Figure 3: Evaluate your willingness to engage in the following activities

4.4 Political Information: Media, Barriers, Expectations

In the effort to develop an effective communication strategy, a crucial factor is the identification of the extent to which the perceptions and positions of the target group are influenced by specific population groups (Figure 4).

Family and close social networks exerted the strongest influence on political attitudes, followed by support staff, political parties, digital connections, mass media and public figures.

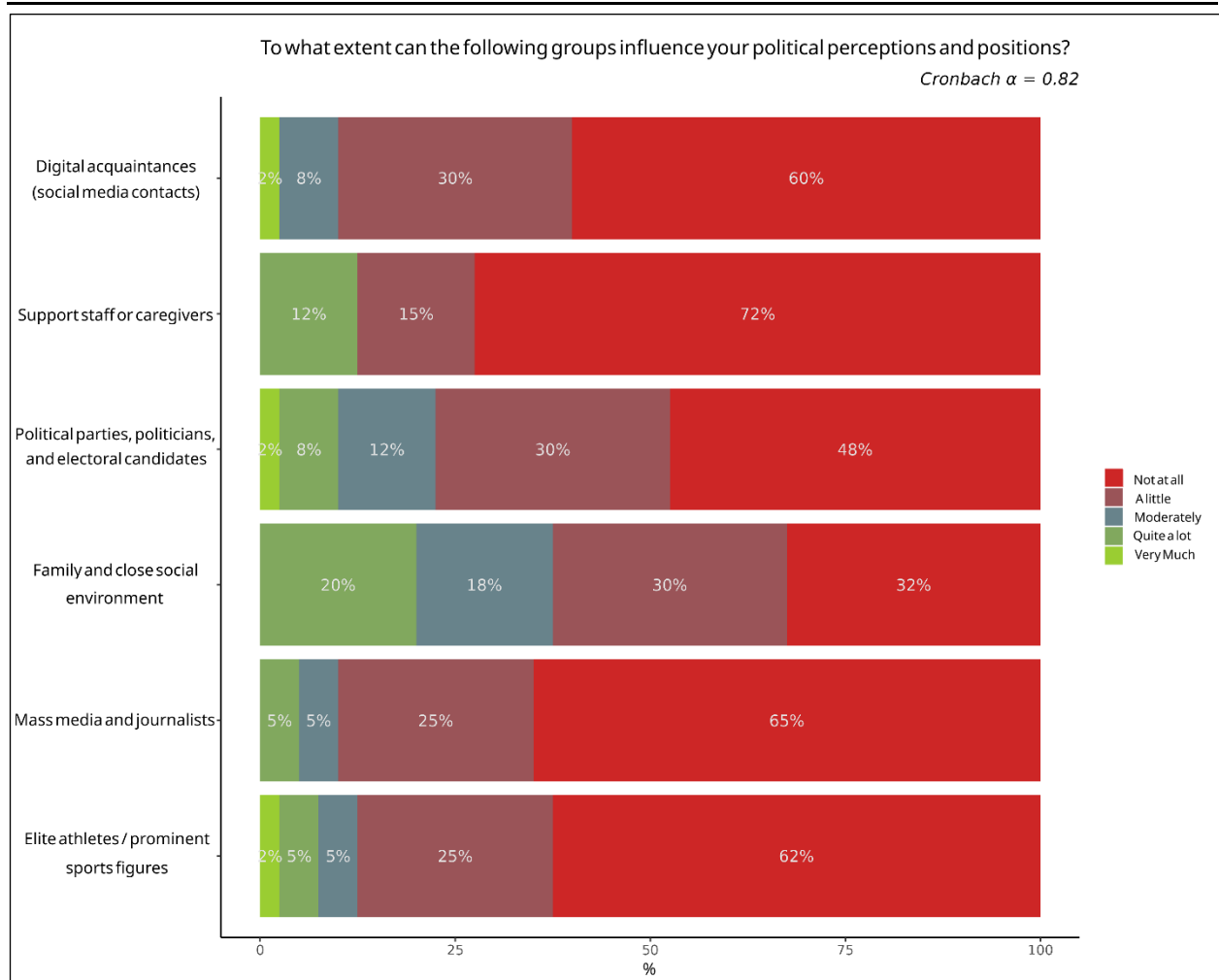


Figure 4: To what extent can the following groups influence your political perceptions and positions?

The choice of the medium for message transmission acquires particular significance in efforts to reach individuals with mobility disabilities, as it determines the degree of accessibility of information.

Participants in the study were asked to report the extent to which they use electronic and online media for their political information (Figure 5). Participants preferred online news websites and social networks as primary sources of political information, followed by television and radio.

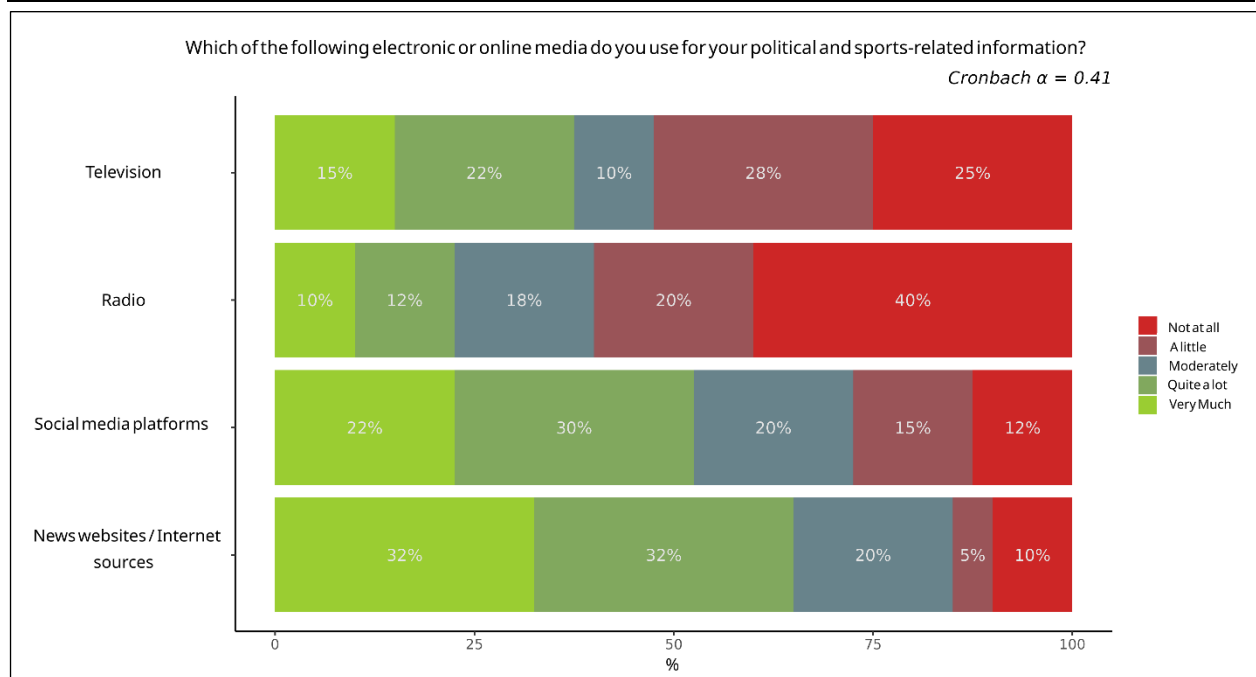


Figure 5: Which of the following electronic or online media do you use for your political and sports-related information?

When asked about perceived effectiveness (Figure 6), websites, social networks, television and email were considered the most appropriate channels for political actors to communicate with individuals with mobility disabilities. Radio and SMS were considered least effective.

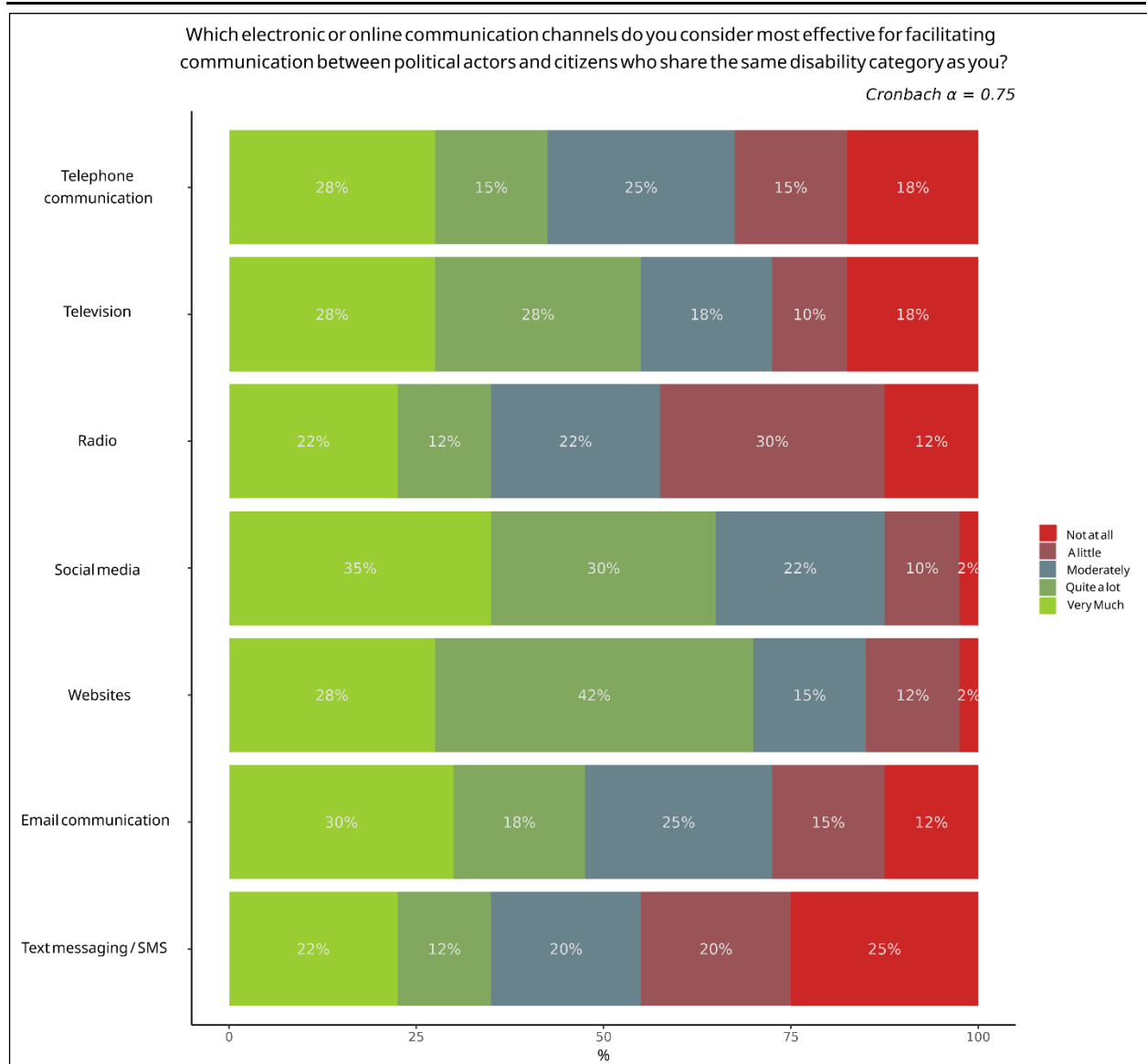


Figure 6: Which electronic or online communication channels do you consider most effective for facilitating communication between political actors and citizens who share the same disability category as you?

MANOVA revealed significant differences ($p < 0.001$) based on educational level (Figure 7). PCA identified two components: PC1 (online sources, social networks) and PC2 (television, radio). Higher education correlated with greater acceptance of digital communication channels.

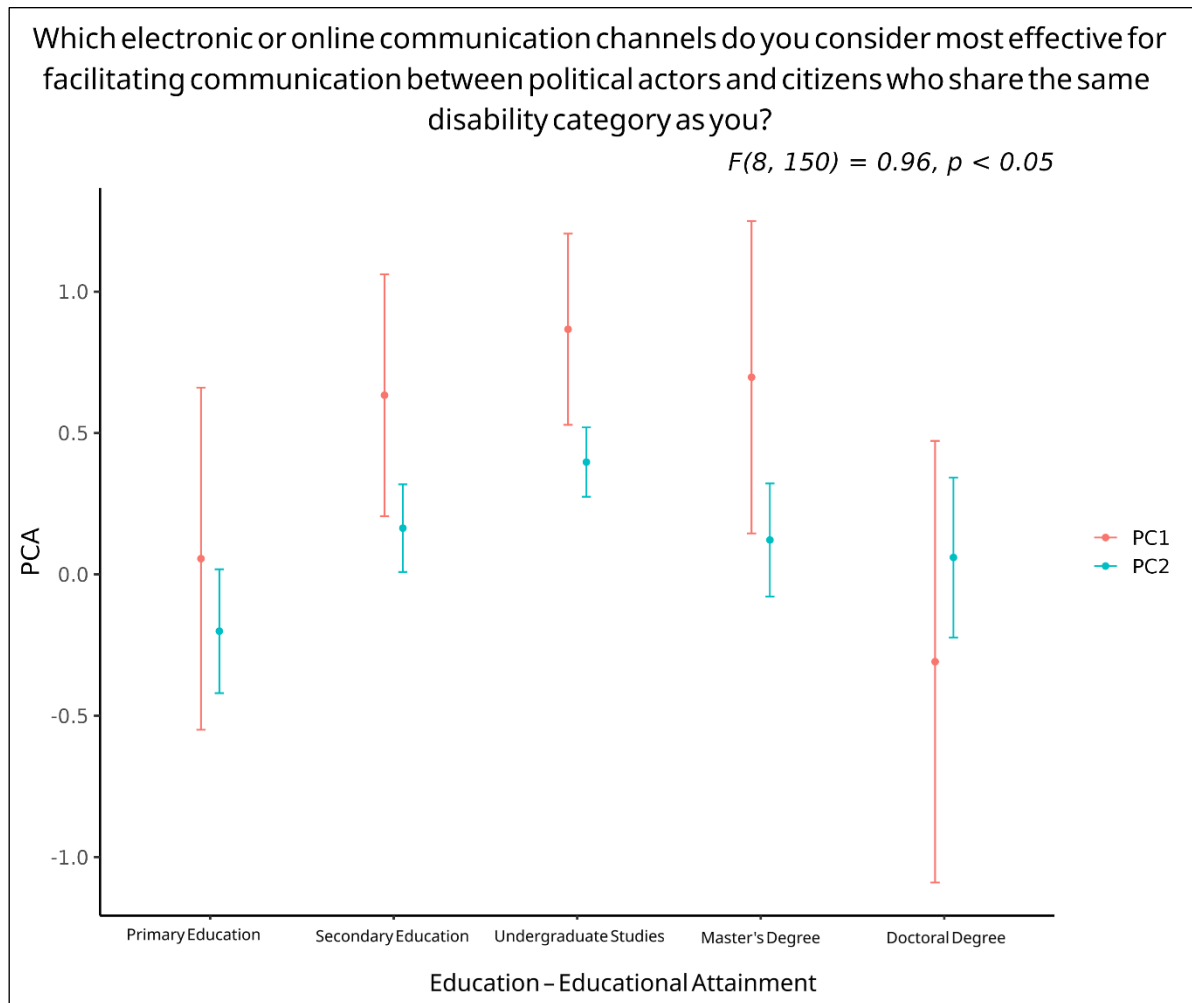


Figure 7: Which electronic or online communication channels do you consider most effective for facilitating communication between political actors and citizens with the same type of disability as yours? - by Education level

4.5 Barriers to Political Communication

Participants identified major barriers (Figure 8), including difficulties accessing voting processes (65% agreement) and the perception that politicians view accessible communication as disproportionately costly relative to political benefit (74% agreement).

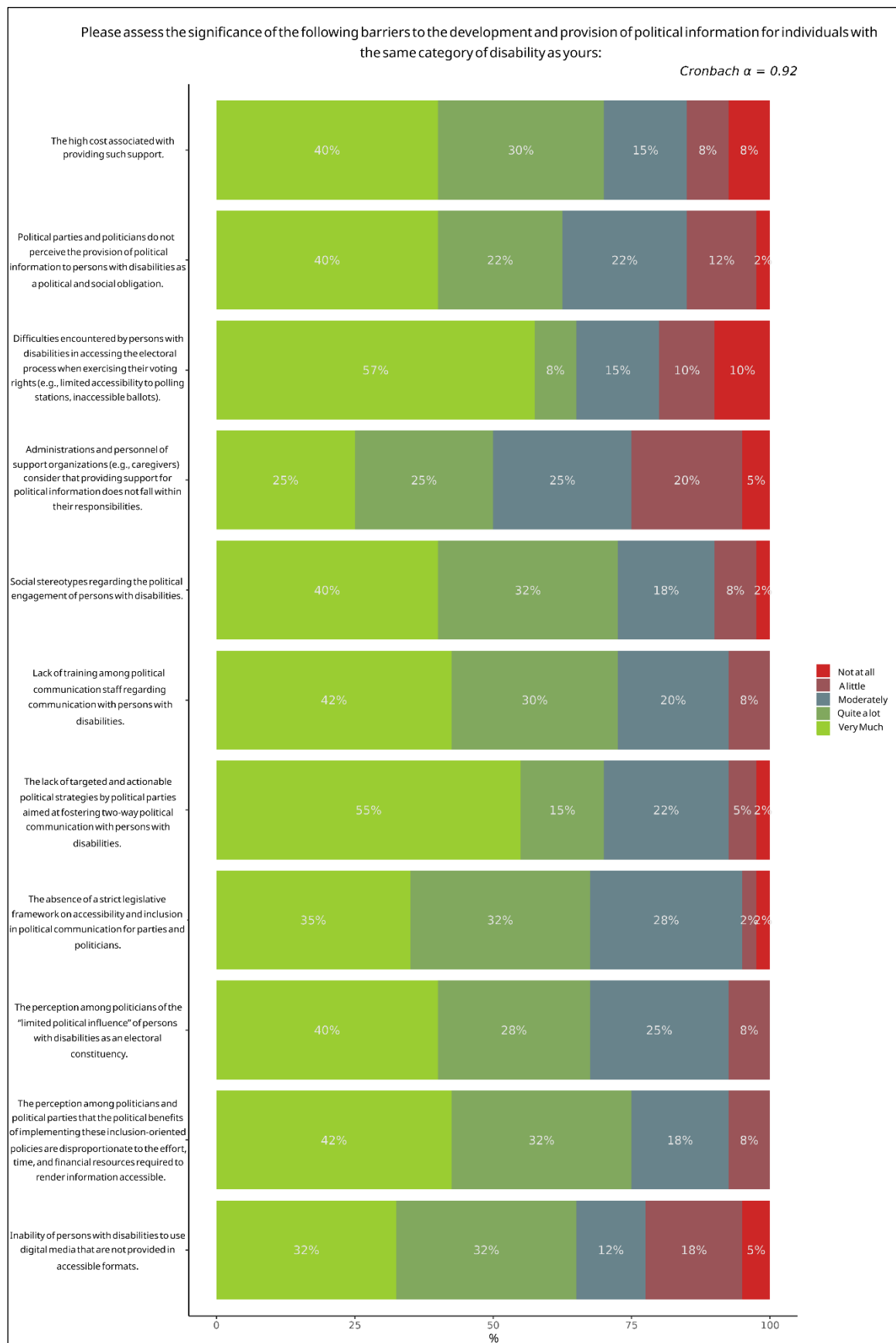


Figure 8: Assess the significance of the following barriers to the development and provision of political information for individuals with the same category of disability as yours

4.6 Expectations for Improving Political Communication

The most strongly supported proposal was training political and party officials: 42% “Very much,” 35% “Quite a lot.” Other highly rated proposals included including individuals with mobility disabilities in communication teams, legislative establishment of accessibility frameworks, and state funding for accessible communication technologies (Figure 9).

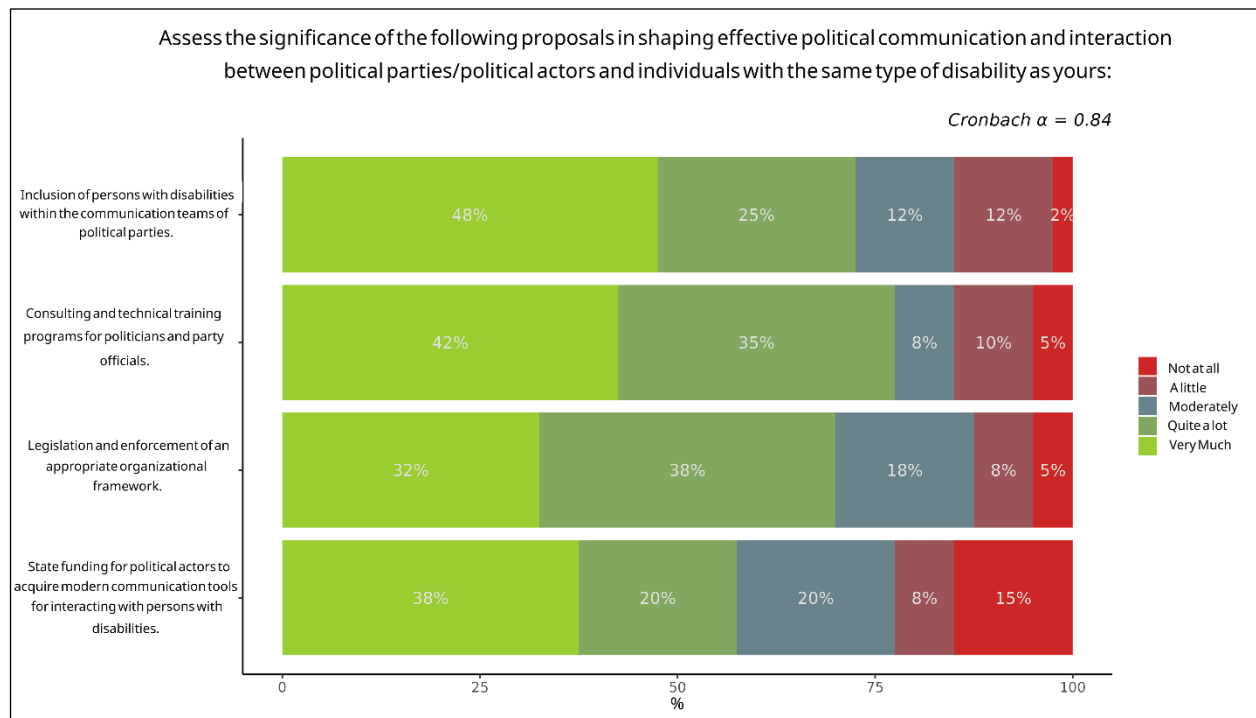


Figure 9: Assess the significance of the following proposals in shaping effective political communication and interaction between political parties/political actors and individuals with the same type of disability as yours

4.7 Overall Perceived Impact

Participants strongly believed that accessible political communication can increase political participation (Figure 10): 38% “Very much,” 45% “Quite a lot,” 12% “Moderately,” 5% “A little.”

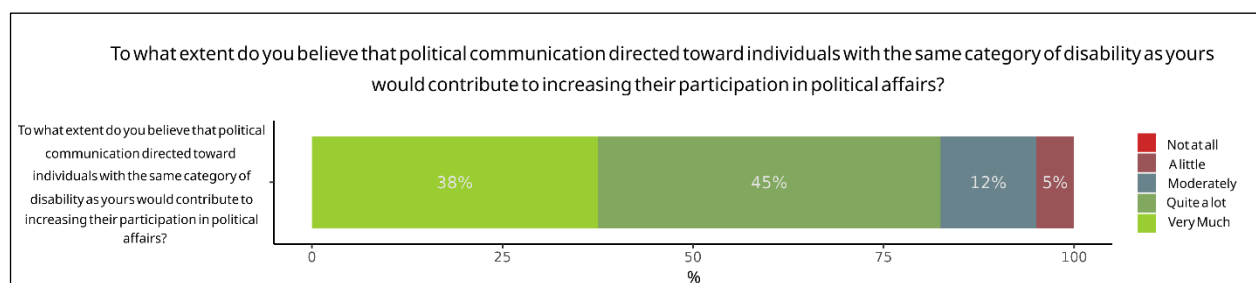


Figure 10: To what extent do you believe that political communication directed toward individuals with the same category of disability as yours would contribute to increasing their participation in political affairs?

5. Discussion

The analysis of the empirical data highlights the high level of interest among individuals with mobility disabilities in Greece regarding current political affairs, despite persistent barriers to accessibility, access to political information, participation in electoral processes, and institutional representation. This finding indicates that individuals with mobility disabilities constitute a politically aware and active segment of society which, nonetheless, remains partially excluded from political participation mechanisms due to inadequate accessibility and institutional support.

The observed correlation between higher educational attainment and increased political news consumption aligns with international research that identifies education as a key factor in political empowerment (Schur et al., 2017). Increased political awareness among more educated individuals may reflect greater familiarity with digital media and better access to alternative sources of information.

Simultaneously, the documented lack of trust in mass media mirrors wider societal trends (Norris, 2011), but acquires particular significance when concerning a group already experiencing marginalization.

The preference of individuals with mobility disabilities for digital and online media as primary channels for political information underscores the role of digital environments as spaces for self-expression, dialogue and participation. Furthermore, the prominence of family and immediate social networks as agents of political influence highlights the importance of interpersonal networks in political socialization. This finding suggests that political communication targeting individuals with mobility disabilities should not be limited to mass communication channels but should also include community empowerment initiatives and the cultivation of inclusive social environments.

The identified barriers—such as difficulties in exercising voting rights and the absence of targeted policies—are consistent with existing literature emphasizing that institutional inertia and lack of accessibility lead to political exclusion (Priestley et al., 2019; Shakespeare, 2017).

The strong interest of participants in feasible policy interventions, such as training for political party officials and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in communication teams, demonstrates that inclusive political practices are not merely theoretical objectives but practical necessities.

Overall, findings confirm that political communication designed with principles of accessibility, empowerment, and institutional support can be a key driver of social inclusion and democratic participation. Developing targeted communication strategies for individuals with mobility disabilities is not simply a matter of political correctness—it is a prerequisite for strengthening democracy and achieving true equality among citizens.

5.1 Recommendations

Despite its limitations, this study contributes significantly to the international literature by providing a basis for developing more targeted and effective political communication strategies.

Future research may expand the findings through qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews with political officials, communication experts and individuals with disabilities, to gain a more nuanced understanding of attitudes and experiences.

Additionally, similar research could be conducted across other disability categories or in different countries to allow for comparative analysis and broaden the scope of investigation.

5.2 Conclusion

This empirical study clearly demonstrated that individuals with mobility disabilities exhibit strong interest in political developments, yet face significant barriers in accessing political information and engaging in political participation.

Education emerged as a decisive factor in political empowerment and activation, enhancing individuals' ability to access information and cultivate critical political awareness. Moreover, the selection of appropriate communication channels and the development of accessible procedures constitute critical parameters for the genuine inclusion of individuals with mobility disabilities in political life.

The low levels of trust toward mass media and institutional bodies highlight the need for targeted communication policies that strengthen transparency and rebuild trust. For the development of an effective political communication framework, integrating the needs and proposals expressed by individuals with mobility disabilities—such as training for political officials and institutional adoption of accessible practices—can play a decisive role in removing barriers and fostering an inclusive democracy.

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