

# BETWEEN FORMAL PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN APATHY: EVIDENCE OF PARTICIPATORY DISCONNECTION IN THE FORMULATION OF TERRITORIAL PUBLIC POLICIES IN COLOMBIA

## ENTRE LA PARTICIPACIÓN FORMAL Y LA APATÍA CIUDADANA: EVIDENCIA DE DESCONEXIÓN PARTICIPATIVA EN LA FORMULACIÓN DE POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS TERRITORIALES EN COLOMBIA

Mauricio Andres Cruzco Pinto<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Unidades Tecnológicas de Santander Country: Colombia Email: [macruzco@correo.uts.edu.co](mailto:macruzco@correo.uts.edu.co)

### Abstract

*This article analyzes the persistent phenomenon of citizen apathy in the formulation of territorial public policies in Colombia, within a context characterized by the formal expansion of participatory mechanisms. Despite institutional strengthening of participation, empirical evidence shows stagnant or declining levels of electoral participation in the country's major cities between 2019 and 2023, with turnout rates ranging from 42% to 55%, according to official data from the National Civil Registry and the Electoral Observation Mission (2019, 2023). This situation reveals a paradox between the institutional design of participation and actual citizen behavior. Drawing on a theoretical-analytical approach and the use of comparative empirical evidence, this study argues that citizen apathy should not be understood as a mere lack of interest, but rather as the result of a structural participatory disconnection, characterized by low levels of institutional trust and a widespread perception of the ineffectiveness of participatory mechanisms (Latinobarómetro, 2023; OECD, 2021). The analysis also examines the impact of corruption, the separation of powers, and social inequality in Colombia, particularly in relation to their effects on citizen participation and the formation of political clans. The article engages with recent literature on governance and participatory democracy (Fung, 2020; Bua & Bussu, 2021), proposing as its main contribution the concept of institutionally disincentivized participation to explain the limitations of current participatory models in territorial contexts. The findings suggest that the formal existence of participatory mechanisms does not guarantee their social appropriation or effectiveness, highlighting the need to rethink the institutional design of participation to strengthen democratic legitimacy and improve public policy outcomes.*

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**Keywords:** citizen participation; governance; public policy; institutional trust; political apathy.

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### Resumen

Este artículo analiza la persistente apatía ciudadana en la formulación de políticas públicas territoriales en Colombia, en un contexto caracterizado por la expansión formal de mecanismos participativos. A pesar del fortalecimiento institucional de la participación, la evidencia empírica muestra niveles de participación electoral estancados o decrecientes en las principales ciudades del país entre 2019 y 2023, con tasas que oscilan entre el 42% y el 55%, según datos oficiales de la Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil (2023) y la Misión de Observación Electoral (2019). Esta situación plantea una paradoja entre el diseño institucional de la participación y el comportamiento ciudadano.

A partir de un enfoque teórico-analítico y del uso de evidencia empírica comparada, el estudio propone que la apatía ciudadana no debe entenderse como una simple falta de interés, sino como el resultado de una desconexión participativa estructural, caracterizada por bajos niveles de confianza institucional y una percepción generalizada de ineficacia de los mecanismos participativos (Latinobarómetro, 2023; OECD, 2021).

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Se analiza el impacto de la corrupción, la separación de poderes y el efecto de la brecha social en Colombia, desde el efecto que tiene en la participación ciudadana y creación de clanes políticos.

El artículo dialoga con la literatura reciente sobre gobernanza y democracia participativa (Fung, 2020; Bua & Bussu, 2021), planteando como contribución el concepto de participación institucionalmente desincentivada, con el fin de explicar las limitaciones de los modelos actuales de participación en contextos territoriales.

Se concluye que la existencia formal de mecanismos participativos no garantiza su apropiación social ni su efectividad, lo que implica la necesidad de repensar el diseño institucional de la participación para fortalecer la legitimidad democrática y mejorar los resultados de las políticas públicas.

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*Palabras clave:* participación ciudadana; gobernanza; políticas públicas; confianza institucional; apatía política.

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### 1. Introduction / Problem Statement

The dynamics of citizen participation in Colombia cannot be understood in isolation from the institutional framework that shapes the democratic system. Institutions such as the National Electoral Council and the National Civil Registry play a central role in the organization and regulation of electoral processes, while oversight bodies such as the Office of the Inspector General and the Office of the Comptroller General influence perceptions of transparency and institutional legitimacy. The degree of coordination—or lack thereof—among these entities directly affects public trust, becoming a key determinant of participatory behavior.

This study contributes to the literature by shifting the analysis of participation from normative approaches toward a structural understanding based on institutional incentives.

Political apathy, particularly among young people, cannot be explained solely as a lack of interest, but rather as a manifestation of disengagement from a political system perceived as unrepresentative and highly contested. Several studies have shown that youth abstention is driven by distrust in political actors and by the perception that participation does not lead to meaningful changes in public decision-making (Bandera, 2023). This phenomenon reinforces the hypothesis of a structural participatory disconnection, as formal mechanisms of participation fail to translate into meaningful experiences of influence for broad sectors of the population, potentially shaped by the effects of corruption and social inequality.

In recent decades, citizen participation has been positioned as a central element in strengthening democratic governance and the legitimacy of public policies. In Latin America, various institutional and legal frameworks have promoted the expansion of participatory mechanisms with the aim of bringing citizens closer to public decision-making processes (Fung, 2020; Bua & Bussu, 2021). However, this formal expansion has not necessarily resulted in greater social appropriation or a sustained increase in citizen engagement in public affairs. In the Colombian

case, this situation becomes evident when examining electoral participation levels in major cities. According to data from the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil (2023) y la Misión de Observación Electoral (2019), participation in territorial elections has remained within a range of 42% to 55%, showing fluctuating and, in some cases, declining trends in cities such as Bogotá and Cali. These figures suggest the persistence of a gap between citizens and democratic institutions, despite efforts to strengthen participatory mechanisms.

This phenomenon is particularly critical among young populations, where electoral abstention has been associated with distrust in political actors and the perception that participation does not produce tangible outcomes in public decision-making (Bandera, 2023). These perceptions are consistent with regional reports indicating low levels of trust in democratic institutions across Latin America, which directly affect citizens' willingness to engage in political and deliberative processes (Latinobarómetro, 2023; OECD, 2021).

In this context, a central paradox emerges despite the existence and expansion of formal participatory mechanisms; effective citizen engagement remains limited. This contradiction raises questions about the effectiveness of the institutional design of participation and its capacity to generate meaningful processes of citizen influence. Recent literature has begun to challenge the linear relationship between the institutionalization of participation and democratic strengthening, emphasizing the need to consider factors such as participation quality, institutional trust, and the actual capacity for influence (Fung, 2020; Bua & Bussu, 2021). From this perspective, the article argues that citizen apathy should not be understood merely as an expression of individual disinterest but as the result of structural distrust, characterized by a gap between institutional participatory mechanisms and citizens' expectations, perceptions, and lived experiences.

Corruption in Colombia has contributed to widening social inequalities across economic,

social, cultural, and political dimensions, reinforcing the concentration of political power among elite groups. This has undermined public trust in institutions and weakened confidence in public investment, further exacerbating political apathy among citizens.

Against this backdrop, the study is guided by the following research question: why, despite the existence and expansion of formal participatory mechanisms, does citizen apathy persist in the formulation of territorial public policies in Colombia? To address this question, the article adopts a theoretical-analytical approach that integrates institutional, structural, and perceptual dimensions, aiming to move beyond traditional approaches focused solely on the formal availability of participatory mechanisms and to contribute to the redesign of participatory strategies that strengthen democratic legitimacy and improve public policy outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review and Analysis

### 2.1. Citizen Participation and Governance: Between the Normative Ideal and Institutional Practice

Citizen participation has been widely recognized as a fundamental pillar in the consolidation of democratic systems and in the strengthening of public governance. From contemporary perspectives, participation is not only conceived as a mechanism for inclusion in decision-making processes but also as a key element contributing to the legitimacy, effectiveness, and quality of public policies (Fung, 2020). In this sense, participatory governance models have promoted the incorporation of citizens into deliberate processes, aiming to overcome the limitations of traditional representative democracy.

However, recent literature has questioned the actual effectiveness of these mechanisms in specific contexts, highlighting that the institutionalization of participation does not necessarily guarantee its social appropriation or its impact on decision-making. Comparative studies have shown that many participatory processes tend to become formal exercises with limited real influence, generating frustration and ultimately discouraging citizen engagement (Bua & Bussu, 2021). This has led to a reconsideration of the relationship between participation and governance, suggesting that the quality of participation is as important as its formal existence.

Participatory governance thus faces a structural tension: while institutional frameworks promote citizen inclusion, political and administrative dynamics may constrain its effectiveness, reducing participation to a symbolic rather than substantive

mechanism. This tension is crucial for understanding patterns of apathy and citizen disengagement in contemporary democratic contexts.

### 2.2. Institutional Trust and Participatory Behavior

One of the most relevant factors in explaining citizen participation is the level of trust in public institutions. Recent empirical evidence has shown that institutional trust directly influences citizens' willingness to engage in political processes, both electoral and deliberative (OECD, 2021). In contexts where perceptions of corruption, inefficiency, or lack of representation are high, levels of participation tend to decline significantly. In Latin America, trust in democratic institutions has exhibited persistently low levels in recent years, negatively affecting citizen participation. According to the Latinobarómetro report (2023), a significant proportion of citizens in the region express distrust toward political parties, governments, and other key institutions, which helps explain high levels of abstention and political apathy.

This context suggests that participation should not be understood solely as an individual decision, but rather as a response conditioned by the institutional environment. In other words, citizen apathy can be interpreted because of institutional delegitimization, rather than merely a lack of interest in public affairs.

### 2.3. Recent Contributions on Participation and Its Limitations

Recent literature has advanced toward a more critical analysis of participatory mechanisms, emphasizing the need to move beyond normative approaches that assume their effectiveness a priori. In this regard, Fung (2020) proposes a more nuanced understanding of participation, recognizing the existence of multiple forms and levels of citizen engagement, each with varying degrees of influence on decision-making processes. Similarly, Bua and Bussu (2021) argue that many participatory processes in Europe and Latin America have been promoted through top-down approaches, which limit their legitimacy and reduce citizens' motivation to engage actively. These authors highlight that, in the absence of effective mechanisms of influence, participation risks becoming a merely consultative exercise, with little or no real impact on public policy outcomes. Recent studies have also emphasized the relationship between participation and perceived political efficacy, understood as the belief that individual action can influence public decisions. When this perception is low, citizens tend to

withdraw from participatory processes, reinforcing dynamics of apathy and disengagement (OECD, 2021). Based on these elements, there is a clear need to reconsider the traditional concept of citizen apathy. Rather than being understood solely as a lack of interest or commitment, apathy can be interpreted as the result of low structural trust, in which citizens perceive a significant gap between formal participatory mechanisms and their actual capacity to influence public decision-making.

In this context, the study proposes the concept of *institutionally disincentivized participation*, referring to situations in which, despite the existence of participatory mechanisms, institutional, political, and social conditions generate negative incentives for citizen engagement. This perspective allows for the integration of variables such as institutional trust, perceived political efficacy, and the quality of participatory processes into a broader explanation of citizen apathy.

Thus, the analysis of citizen participation in the formulation of territorial public policies requires moving beyond descriptive approaches toward interpretations that account for the structural dynamics shaping citizen behavior in democratic contexts.

### 3. Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this study is to analyze the structural causes of citizen apathy in the formulation of territorial public policies in Colombia, focusing on the relationship between the institutional design of participation, levels of trust in public institutions, and participatory behavior.

Specifically, the article aims to: examine recent trends in electoral participation in major Colombian cities based on official data; analyze the role of institutional trust as a key factor in explaining participatory behavior; identify the limitations of formal participatory mechanisms in territorial contexts; and propose a theoretical reinterpretation of citizen apathy through the concepts of *structural participatory disconnection* and *institutionally disincentivized participation*.

#### Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical-analytical approach aimed at understanding complex social phenomena through the integration of conceptual frameworks and secondary empirical evidence. This approach enables a critical examination of the relationships between citizen participation, governance, and institutional trust, moving beyond purely descriptive analyses. It is particularly suitable for studying complex

phenomena such as citizen participation, where institutional, perceptual, and structural variables require interpretation rather than experimental analysis.

In terms of research design, the study is non-experimental, as it does not involve the manipulation of variables but instead analyzes phenomena within their natural context. An interpretative perspective is employed to explain the underlying dynamics of participatory behavior in territorial settings.

The research is based on the analysis of secondary sources, including:

- (i) official electoral participation data from the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil (2023);
- (ii) technical reports from the Misión de Observación Electoral (2019);
- (iii) regional reports on institutional trust, such as those published by Latinobarómetro (2023) and the OECD (2021); and
- (iv) recent academic literature (2020–2024) on governance, citizen participation, and political behavior.

Data analysis is conducted using a documentary and comparative approach, allowing for the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships among key variables, such as electoral participation levels, institutional trust, and perceived political efficacy.

The study has an explanatory-interpretative scope, as it seeks to understand the structural causes of citizen apathy beyond its empirical description. The analysis focuses on the Colombian context, with particular emphasis on territorial dynamics and major urban centers.

The use of secondary sources facilitates a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon, oriented not toward establishing direct causal relationships but toward identifying structural patterns and tensions shaping participatory behavior.

Nevertheless, some limitations must be acknowledged. First, reliance on secondary sources implies dependence on the availability and quality of existing data. Second, the absence of primary data limits the ability to explore individual perceptions in greater depth, particularly among specific groups such as young people. However, these limitations are mitigated through the triangulation of official data, institutional reports, and recent academic literature, thereby ensuring the robustness of the analysis.

### 4. Analysis and Results

#### 4.1. Electoral Participation in Territorial Contexts

The analysis of electoral participation in Colombia's major cities reveals patterns that call

into question the effectiveness of institutional participatory mechanisms. According to official data from the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil (2023) and the Misión de Observación Electoral (2019), participation in local elections between 2019 and 2023 has remained at moderate levels, with turnout rates ranging between 42% and 55%. These figures are relatively low compared to participation levels in consolidated democracies, suggesting structural limitations in the development of a participatory political culture.

The relationship between participation and institutional trust is also mediated by the overall functioning of the political system. Citizens' perceptions of electoral transparency, campaign financing, and the oversight of political processes—areas in which the Consejo Nacional Electoral plays a key role—significantly influence the legitimacy of the democratic system. Likewise, trust in representative institutions such as the Congress of the Republic of Colombia becomes a crucial factor in understanding citizens' willingness to engage in political processes. Beyond absolute levels, the comparative behavior of participation is particularly relevant. In cities such as Bogotá and Cali, electoral participation has declined, while in others, such as Medellín, moderate increases can be observed. However, these variations do not indicate a sustained upward trend; rather, they reflect a fluctuating pattern that underscores the absence of a structural consolidation of citizen participation.

This scenario suggests that electoral participation, understood as one of the most basic forms of political engagement, fails to strengthen consistently, thereby revealing limitations in the institutional system's capacity to mobilize citizens in a sustained manner.

#### **4.2. Electoral Participation and Institutional Trust: A Conditioned Relationship**

The evidence analyzed suggests an indirect relationship between levels of electoral participation and trust in public institutions. In contexts where institutional legitimacy is questioned, participation tends to weaken, a pattern widely documented in recent studies (OECD, 2021).

In Latin America, low levels of trust in institutions such as political parties, governments, and representative bodies have been identified as key determinants of participatory behavior. According to the Latinobarómetro report (2023), a significant proportion of the population expresses distrust toward democratic institutions, which directly affects their willingness to engage in political processes.

In the Colombian case, this relationship is reflected in electoral participation that fails to consolidate, despite the existence of formal mechanisms of inclusion. Thus, the decision to participate cannot be understood solely as an individual act, but rather as a response conditioned by the institutional environment and by perceptions of political efficacy.

#### **4.3. Youth Participation: Evidence of Disconnection**

One of the most significant findings in the analysis of participatory behavior concerns the situation of the youth population. Various studies and analyses have shown that this group exhibits particularly high levels of electoral abstention, associated with factors such as disinterest, distrust, and the perceived irrelevance of politics in their daily lives. Youth abstention cannot be explained solely by a lack of information or motivation, but rather by a deeper perception of disconnection from the political system. As noted by Bandera (2023), young people tend to perceive that their participation does not lead to meaningful change, which significantly reduces their willingness to engage in electoral and deliberative processes.

This phenomenon is consistent with the notion of low political efficacy, understood as the perception that individual action has little or no impact on public decision-making. Consequently, youth participation becomes a critical indicator of the structural limitations of current participatory models.

The findings of this study have important implications for the formulation of public policies at the territorial level. They highlight the need to move beyond approaches focused solely on expanding formal participatory mechanisms and instead advance toward models that prioritize the quality, effectiveness, and actual impact of participatory processes.

This implies, among other aspects: strengthening institutional trust through transparency and accountability practices; designing participatory mechanisms that produce visible outcomes for citizens; incorporating differentiated strategies for specific groups, such as young people; and promoting binding participatory processes that go beyond a merely consultative role. Additionally, strengthening enforcement mechanisms against corruption—such as stricter legal sanctions and more effective accountability for public officials—may contribute to rebuilding citizens' trust in public institutions.

In sum, strengthening citizen participation requires not only adequate normative frameworks but also institutional conditions that actively

incentivize and legitimize effective citizen engagement in public decision-making.

**5. Discussion of Results and Findings**

**5.1. The Paradox of Participation: Institutionalization without Appropriation**

The findings reveal a central tension in contemporary models of participatory governance: the coexistence of an increasing institutionalization of participatory mechanisms alongside limited citizen appropriation. This paradox challenges one of the most widespread assumptions in literature, namely that the expansion of participatory spaces automatically leads to democratic strengthening. Citizen apathy cannot be analyzed in isolation from the performance of institutions responsible for ensuring transparency, accountability, and political representation. The interaction among electoral bodies, oversight institutions, and decision-making arenas constitutes an institutional ecosystem that directly shapes public trust. When these institutions fail to generate perceptions of legitimacy, dynamics of disengagement are reinforced, ultimately affecting participation. This

phenomenon indicates that the issue extends beyond the design of participatory mechanisms, pointing instead to broader challenges related to the coherence and effectiveness of the institutional system.

In contrast to normative perspectives, the findings show that in the Colombian context, the mere existence of formal mechanisms does not translate into higher levels of effective participation. This result is consistent with Fung (2020), who argues that participation can take multiple forms with varying degrees of influence, and that its effectiveness depends more on its design and implementation than on its mere existence. Similarly, Bua and Bussu (2021) contend that many participatory processes, driven by top-down institutional logics, tend to generate low levels of citizen engagement.

In this sense, the results suggest that the institutionalization of participation, in the absence of conditions that ensure its effectiveness, may lead to predominantly symbolic processes that fail to establish strong and meaningful links between citizens and institutions.

City	Stake 2019 (%)	Stake 2023 (%)	Variation (pp)
Bogotá	53.2	51.8	-1.4
Medellín	55.1	57.3	+2.2
Cali	50.4	47.9	-2.5
Barranquilla	48.7	49.5	+0.8
Cartagena	46.3	44.8	-1.5

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil (2019, 2023).

As shown in the table, electoral participation in the country’s major cities exhibits limited variation and does not reflect a sustained upward trend. This pattern suggests the presence of structural stagnation in participation levels, rather than short-term fluctuations. From a comparative perspective, these levels are consistent with contexts of low institutional trust, reinforcing the hypothesis that citizen participation in Colombia is shaped by factors that go beyond the mere availability of formal participatory mechanisms.

**5.2. Apathy as a Rational Response: The Role of Institutional Trust**

One of the most relevant contributions of the analysis is the reinterpretation of citizen apathy not as a democratic anomaly, but as a rational response to contexts of low institutional trust. Electoral participation data, together with evidence on citizens’ perceptions, suggest that individuals tend to abstain from participating when they believe their involvement lacks real impact.

This finding aligns with OECD (2021), which highlights the direct relationship between institutional trust and citizen participation. In contexts where institutions are perceived as inefficient or unrepresentative, participation tends to decline – not due to disinterest, but due to a lack of incentives.

In Latin America, this dynamic is further reinforced by persistently low levels of trust in democratic institutions, as documented by Latinobarómetro (2023). Under these conditions, apathy ceases to be an individual phenomenon and instead becomes a reflection of structural factors shaping the relationship between citizens and the state.

In the Colombian context, citizen participation in territorial planning is formally embedded within institutional frameworks designed to involve communities in decision-making processes. According to the Departamento Nacional de Planeación (2023), mechanisms such as territorial planning councils and participatory spaces are

intended to facilitate citizen input in the formulation of development plans. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms largely depends on their capacity to generate real influence on policy outcomes, highlighting the gap between formal participation and substantive citizen engagement.

### 5.3. Youth and Participation: Between Disenchantment and Symbolic Exclusion

The analysis of youth participation provides deeper insight into the dynamics of disconnection identified in this study. Rather than being apathetic in a strict sense, young people appear to express forms of disengagement from a political system they perceive as unrepresentative and highly contested. As noted by Bandera (2023), youth abstention is associated with distrust and with the belief that participation does not lead to meaningful change. This finding is consistent with recent literature on political efficacy, which suggests that participation largely depends on the perceived capacity to influence public decision-making. Low youth participation can be interpreted as a form of symbolic exclusion, whereby institutional mechanisms fail to effectively incorporate the expectations, discourses, and modes of participation characteristic of younger generations. This reinforces the argument that the issue lies not only with citizens but also with the system's capacity to create meaningful participatory spaces.

This situation reflects a combination of structural and institutional factors. On the one hand, territorial disparities highlighted by the Censo Nacional Agropecuario reveal significant limitations in access to public services, technical assistance, and state presence in rural areas, which shape the relationship between citizens and institutions. On the other hand, levels of institutional trust reported by DANE, the national statistical authority, indicate a critical perception of the functioning of the political system. These challenges are compounded by concerns related to electoral transparency and legitimacy, as identified by the Consejo Nacional Electoral, creating a context in which citizen participation is discouraged not only by individual factors but also by structural conditions that limit its effectiveness.

### 6. Conclusions

This study analyzed the persistent phenomenon of citizen apathy in the formulation of territorial public policies in Colombia, demonstrating that, despite the formal expansion of participatory mechanisms, levels of citizen engagement remain limited. Electoral participation data from the

country's major cities, supported by information from the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil (2023) y la Misión de Observación Electoral (2019), show fluctuating and, in some cases, declining patterns, confirming the existence of a gap between citizens and democratic institutions.

One of the main contributions of this article lies in the reinterpretation of citizen apathy not as a simple lack of individual interest, but as the outcome of structural conditions in which factors such as low institutional trust, the limited influence of participatory mechanisms, and the misalignment between institutional design and citizens' expectations create adverse conditions for participation. In this regard, the findings are consistent with regional evidence indicating persistently low levels of trust in democratic institutions across Latin America (Latinobarómetro, 2023; OECD, 2021). The impact of corruption on citizens' trust is particularly significant, especially considering that Colombia has been ranked 99th out of 182 countries worldwide in corruption perception, with a score of 37 out of 100—where 0 represents the highest level of corruption and 100 the highest level of transparency—according to Transparency for Colombia (2026). The results further demonstrate that citizen apathy in Colombia cannot be understood as a mere lack of individual interest, but rather as the result of a structural disconnection between citizens and institutional frameworks. This disconnection emerges from the interaction of factors such as low institutional trust, limited effectiveness of participatory mechanisms, and territorial disparities that shape the relationship between the state and citizens.

The article contributes to the literature by offering a structural reinterpretation of participatory dynamics, introducing the concept of *institutionally disincentivized participation* as an analytical tool to better understand the limitations of current models of participatory governance.

Nevertheless, the study presents limitations associated with the use of secondary sources, which restrict the ability to explore individual perceptions in depth. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating primary data and quantitative methodologies to empirically test the relationships identified in this study. Low levels of citizen participation cannot be analyzed in isolation from perceptions of the political system. According to the DANE - National Administrative Department of Statistics (2022), trust in institutions such as political parties and Congress remains low, directly influencing citizens' willingness to engage in political and deliberate processes.

Overall, this approach shifts the analysis from individual responsibility toward the structural conditions that shape participatory behavior, offering a more comprehensive perspective on democratic governance.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that strengthening citizen participation cannot be limited to the expansion of formal mechanisms, but must also ensure conditions of effectiveness, legitimacy, and real capacity to influence public decision-making. This requires advancing toward more inclusive and binding models of participation, adapted to contemporary social dynamics—particularly concerning young populations, whose low levels of engagement reflect deep tensions between the political system and emerging forms of citizenship.

The study also acknowledges the need for further research through the use of primary data, which would allow for a more detailed exploration of citizens' perceptions and motivations to participate or abstain. In particular, the development of comparative studies and quantitative analyses is recommended to complement the theoretical-analytical approach proposed here, to strengthen the understanding of the phenomenon and contribute to the design of more effective and legitimate public policies.

The findings highlight that citizen participation in Colombia is shaped by the interaction among multiple institutional actors, including electoral bodies, oversight institutions, representative entities, and organizations responsible for public policy formulation. The lack of effective coordination among these institutions, together with limitations in transparency, influence, and legitimacy, contributes to the consolidation of contexts of *institutionally disincentivized participation*. Strengthening participatory democracy, therefore, requires not only the expansion of formal mechanisms but also a comprehensive transformation of the institutional ecosystem that underpins the relationship between citizens and the state.

#### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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