

# La confianza institucional como un determinante de la evaluación ciudadana del acceso a la información a nivel municipal en Chile<sup>1</sup>

**Institutional trust as a determinant of citizen evaluation of access to information at the municipal level in Chile**

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## Resumen

¿Qué factores influyen en la evaluación ciudadana sobre la transparencia municipal? El estudio, a partir de los datos de la Encuesta Nacional de Transparencia de 2020 elaborado por el Consejo para la Transparencia de Chile, evalúa dos hipótesis sobre los determinantes de la satisfacción ciudadana con el acceso a la información pública a nivel local: una mayor confianza en el sector público y una ideología de izquierda moldean positivamente la percepción ciudadana sobre la transparencia local. A partir de un análisis de regresión logística se encuentra evidencia que indica que la confianza con

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los organismos públicos sí afecta la evaluación ciudadana incrementando la probabilidad de estar satisfecho con la información recibida, descartando la influencia de la orientación ideológica.

**Palabras clave:** Transparencia, acceso a la información, municipios en Chile, confianza ciudadana, ideología.

### Abstract

What factors determine citizen's evaluation of municipal transparency? The study, based on data from the 2020 National Transparency Survey prepared by the Chilean Transparency Council, evaluates two hypotheses on the determinants of citizen satisfaction with transparency and access to public information at the local level: greater trust in the public sector and a leftist ideology positively shape citizen perception of local transparency. From a logistic regression analysis, we find evidence that indicates that trust in public agencies does affect citizen evaluation by increasing the probability of being satisfied with the information received; the influence of ideological orientation is dismissed.

**Keywords:** Transparency, Access to Public Information, Chilean Municipalities, Citizen Confidence, Ideology.

### Introduction

Several studies underline that transparency is characterised by the notion of accountability (López-Ayllón, 2007; Rourke, 1960; Schedler, 2004; Stiglitz, 2002; Vishwanath & Kaufmann 1999). To Schedler (2004), accountability refers to the checks and balances for monitoring and restricting the exercise of power, which is necessarily linked to access to public information in two dimensions. First, responsibility as an obligation of politicians and public officials to report on their decisions and justify them publicly. Second, the citizens' capacity to sanction when the authorities have committed excesses or omissions in the use of their powers.

According to Pastor (2021: 14), the analysis of transparency public policies cannot be made in isolation from the understanding of the institutional and political context (polity) in which it takes shape and is consolidated, thus being conditioned to its evolution and mutations, which is especially true for its definition and measurement: in the late twentieth century, for a neo-liberal or neo-managerial state such as Chile, it was to interpret transparency policies as the guarantee of the right to access public information—which does not take into account the new realities of the neo-public or open State in the first decades of the 21st century—and of the development and implementation of policies to modernise public action and improve democracy, such as the second generation of “open government” policies that broadened the focus of interest from transparency and access to information to participation and collaboration (Pastor, 2018: 240-241). Law 20.285 on access to public information was passed in Chile in 2008 in this new context of improving the quality of democracy (Ley 20.285, 2008).

Most of these authors contributed successive approaches to the concept of transparency. From a traditional perspective focused on the dissemination of information processes from public action to

society, it is the citizenry who turns to public institutions in demand of information relevant to them; this relationship with institutions is called *passive transparency*. The arrival and progression of the 21st century has actively pushed governments and public administrations to publicise their policies' actions, decisions, and results, which has been called *active transparency* (Corojan & Campos, 2011: 57; as cited in Pastor, 2021: 16).

Thus, transparency can be defined as the duty of all public authorities to account for their actions and to explain them in a reasoned and reasonable manner (Arenilla & Redondo, 2011:360). In addition, transparency is also a means of ensuring that decisions are reasoned and reasonable and that the information used to make decisions is accessible to the public (Jiménez et al., 2012). However, the most important thing is that citizens can evaluate the performance of institutions and keep trusting them (Labeaga & Muñoz, 2013).

According to Vishwanath and Kaufmann (1999: 2), a broad concept of transparency, both active and passive, can be understood as a greater openness and sharing of information that allows the public to make informed political decisions, improve the responsiveness of governments, and reduce corruption. The close relationship between access to public information and democratic governance mechanisms can be seen in the possibility for citizens to know the information in the hands of the State and to subject its decision-making processes to permanent public evaluation.

Following Hofmann (as cited in Pastor, 2021: 17), the transparency policy of institutions can go further, publicising not only the information that they are obliged to disclose by law but also that which may be of interest to society or a specific target audience (*proactive and focused transparency*, respectively). This perspective is linked to a more *relational* approach to the State's actions, accentuated by the emergence of the "governance" and "open government" paradigms that generalize the principle of collaboration with the private sector—part of the "new public management" paradigm—to public administration itself, to other non-governmental public actors, and to society as a whole (Pastor, 2018: 240).

In line with the most prominent approach of the 21st century, part of the academic literature conceives transparency policy as a fundamental tool of public action to improve the quality of democracy, focusing on its effects on the control of the exercise of power, the prevention of corruption, the promotion of accountability, and, ultimately, the achievement of good governance that legitimises public institutions (Pastor, 2021: 18). Morlino agrees with this approach and, alongside Diamond (2004: 21-22 and Morlino, 2005, 2007; as cited in Pastor, 2021: 30-32), developed a proposal for the operationalisation of the dimensions of the quality of democracy in terms of content, procedures, and results. This classification is adapted by Pastor (2021) to evaluate the impacts of transparency policies on the quality of democracy.

Thus, a positive impact of a transparency policy on the *freedom* and *equality* variables will improve the quality of the content of democracy. If the positive impact is on the *rule of law*, *accountability*, or *participation* variables, the evaluation would be assessing the improvement of the procedural quality of democracy. Finally, if it impacts *responsiveness*, it will affect the evaluation of the quality of results (Pastor, 2021: 32-40).

Based on the latter dimension, Pastor takes the distinction made by Easton (1975) between the two types of support to the political system, *diffuse* and *specific*—the former linked to legitimacy by processes and the latter to legitimacy by results or performance—and relates them to the positive impacts of the transparency policy on the quality of results or *responsiveness*: this can improve by an increase in the diffuse support to institutions in their procedures dimension (openness to society, disclosure of decision-making processes, citizen participation) and by an improvement in citizen satisfaction with the performance of institutions (in terms of the legality, effectiveness, and efficiency of their actions) through specific support for the public policies they develop.

This is the variable chosen in this article to analyse satisfaction with the municipal transparency policy, i.e., *responsiveness* in its procedures and performance dimensions, which have an impact on the trust and *diffuse* and *specific* political support variables. In both types of support, the improvement of democratic quality translates into improved mutual trust and learning between institutions and citizens (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007: 15; as cited in Pastor, 2021: 39). The great challenge for governments and public administrations is “for their public transparency policies to really generate and provide institutional legitimacy” (Pastor, 2021: 39), and to demonstrate that transparency works better at the local level than at the national level due to the greater proximity that exists (Keuffer & Mabillard, 2020, as cited in Villoria, 2020: 230).

## **Contributions to the study of the impact of satisfaction with transparency on trust in Chilean municipalities**

Despite the importance of transparency policies for improving legitimacy and trust in institutions, in Chile, there is little evidence of the contribution of citizen evaluation of municipal transparency policy to the improvement of trust in municipalities, and specifically of their response to requests for access to information. This with the exception of pioneering studies such as those by Segovia et al. (2008), Morales (2008), or those made by the Transparency Council (CPLT, for its acronym in Spanish) since 2009, which is the agency in charge of overseeing the implementation of Law 20.285; those more recent, such as those by the Public Policy Centre of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (2016a; 2016b); and the most recent one by Riffo et al. (2019).

Segovia et al. (2008) analyzed the central components of the evaluation judgments of institutional trust, including municipalities, in a Chilean sample through a survey conducted in Santiago in 2005, where they identified the weight of the *capacity* and *benevolence* components. The capacity component refers to people's perception of the institution's *performance*, its efficiency and effectiveness, and the extent to which it has the preparation and resources to meet its goals. Transparency is another factor that contributes to evaluating institutional capacity and quality of policies and practices (Segovia et al., 2008: 44). The conceptualisation of the capacity component brings it closer to the conceptualisation of *responsiveness* in its performance evaluation dimension and to Easton's definition of *specific support* to institutions.

The second component, benevolence, relates to the orientation of the institutions' goals towards the well-being of the citizenry, the belief on the part of the citizenry that the institution will act in good will

to pursue the common good. In this sense, transparency contributes to generating information flows that make it possible to verify this orientation of the institutions' actions towards the common good (Segovia et al., 2008: 56). This conceptualisation brings it closer to the procedures dimensions of the *responsiveness* concept, linked to the institutional processes and the *diffuse support* to institutions defined by Easton.

The results of the study conducted by Segovia et al. (2008: 50), based on a survey conducted in Santiago in 2005, placed municipalities with one of the highest positive correlations between trust in them and the evaluation of their capacity (0.69), only surpassed by the Police (Carabineros) and the Investigative Police (Policía de Investigaciones). In contrast, with respect to the benevolence factor, its correlation with trust in municipalities was 0.55, below the Carabineros, the President of the Republic, the Investigative Police, the government, the Armed Forces, and the Public Ministry, and only surpassing the Courts of Justice, the Supreme Court, the political parties, and the Congress. In other words, institutional trust in municipalities was based on the high valuation of their capacity to develop their policies and a much lower satisfaction with their prioritisation of the common good, with their benevolence.

This pioneering study is relevant because it was conducted before the passing of Law 20.285 on access to public information and its implementation at the municipal level, which had an impact on citizens' evaluation of their trust in municipalities. What emerges is that the greatest challenge that municipalities faced at that time was to improve the evaluation of their benevolence, that is, of their contribution to the improvement of the procedural aspects of the transparency policy that have an impact on the quality of democracy.

This partially coincides with the study by Morales (2008), which, although it does not explicitly refer to transparency as one of the variables of trust in institutions, it concludes that, as far as democratic and representative institutions are concerned, one of the two variables that affect institutional trust is government *performance*, that is, the citizenry's perception of a real effort by institutions to resolve issues of priority interest to them, evaluating their performance (specific support) and their interest in prioritising their demands (diffuse support, or *benevolence*). Morales cites Hiskey and Seligson (2003) to illustrate this statement in the case of municipalities: "in effect, citizens express higher levels of trust in their municipality when they perceive that it has performed in accordance with their expectations" (2008: 164).

By analysing the determinants of institutional trust in Chile based on data provided by the 2014 Americas Barometer survey conducted by the *Latin American Public Opinion Project* (LAPOP), Riffo et al. (2019: 98-99) indicate that the main findings regarding municipalities are that good performance in those matters that citizens consider to be under municipal jurisdiction, such as citizen security (shared with the executive), education, and health, have a statistically significant impact on citizen trust. Even without considering the transparency variable, the results of this study are very relevant because they coincide with those policies that the population considers of greater interest when accessing public information: health (82%) and education (74%) (CPLT, 2021: 63).

In 2015, the Public Policy Centre of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile began analysing municipal trust in Chile— publishing its findings in 2016—assessing citizens' expectations

in relation to institutions in their evaluation of *technical competence* and *integrity*. Of the five components that the OECD (2013) proposes to evaluate citizen expectations on the performance of institutions, *responsiveness* and *integrity* coincide with the previous dimensions; however, it adds *openness* and *inclusiveness*, a component directly linked to the transparency policy (active and passive) that also contemplates neighbourhood participation (CPP, 2016a: 13-14).

*Responsiveness* and *integrity* correspond to the institutional performance evaluation dimension: transparency policies facilitate the evaluation of this dimension by improving public scrutiny, controlling discretionality and adjusting their logic of action to the principles of legality, effectiveness, and efficiency. *Openness* and *inclusiveness* correspond to the institutional process evaluation dimension: in this case, transparency policies make it possible to evaluate decision-making processes, fostering open processes of public debate in which citizens can participate, thus improving the perception that the results achieved by municipal policies are fair and legitimate (Pastor, 2021: 39).

In the field diagnosis carried out by the Public Policy Centre in four municipalities of Santiago, among neighbours, public officials, and municipal authorities, citizens' trust would decrease due to the negative evaluation of the integrity component of performance and inclusiveness (processes): "From the perspective of the interviews conducted, municipal management would be insufficient because of conflicts of interest, because the well-being of all the people would not be a priority, or because it would be far removed from the reality of the neighbours" (CPP, 2016a: 18).

In terms of *openness* and *inclusiveness*, citizens consider that they do not have adequate information to oversee municipal management or on how they can apply for municipal benefits. A very significant barrier to approaching the municipality and getting informed is the degree of organisation: unorganised people say they do not have time or sufficient knowledge about how municipal administration works (CPP, 2016a: 24).

In 2016, the Public Policy Centre conducted a nationwide survey on citizen perceptions about municipalities that included evaluations of their attributes. For this survey, some of the expectations listed by the OECD were used to evaluate institutional trust, such as *responsiveness* plus *transparency and dissemination of information* and *effective participation of neighbours* (*openness* and *inclusiveness*).

In general, the municipal attributes are evaluated more negatively than positively, except for the treatment received by neighbours by public officials: of the three factors mentioned, the one evaluated most negatively is *responsiveness* (50% of the people surveyed evaluated it negatively), followed by the process evaluation, *transparency and dissemination of information*, and *effective participation of neighbours* factors (45.3%). As for the positive evaluations, the best evaluated are the *openness* and *inclusiveness* factors (process evaluation), such as *transparency* (24.4 % consider it so) and *effective participation of neighbours* (21.9 %), followed by *responsiveness* (18.5 %) (performance evaluation) (CPP, 2016b: 28).

This result, apparently contradictory to the results of the qualitative fieldwork given its negative evaluation of performance, may find a partial explanation in the responses to the evaluation of the *fulfilment of promises and agreements* attribute, the most negatively evaluated one and the one that received the lowest positive evaluation together with *responsiveness*. This is probably an evaluation of

the fulfilment of expectations of satisfying promises made concerning citizen demands, a dimension more related to lack of benevolence than to performance.

Of the seven attributes taken into account by the Public Policy Centre, *transparency and dissemination of information* is the second best rated—after *good treatment towards neighbours by public officials*—and the third with the lowest negative rating—behind good work by public officials and almost tied with *fieldwork*. Thus, according to this study by the Public Policy Centre, transparency is one of the most highly valued dimensions of municipal performance, even higher than *responsiveness*, although it is not accompanied by a correlative valuation of *effective participation of neighbours*, an aspect that can clearly be improved. The transparency attribute is valued highly by older adults.

All this taking into account that the second most frequent type of interaction that citizens have with their municipality is for requesting information (44.1 %), second only to carrying out administrative procedures (53.1 %). Furthermore, it is statistically significant that women are the ones who most frequently request information (48%, compared to 40% of men) in the smaller municipalities (less than 20,000 inhabitants, 55%) (CPR, 2016b: 52-53).

In this sense, the evaluation made by citizens according to the Public Policy Centre's study on the *openness and inclusiveness* municipal attribute could affect other parts of the transparency system, such as the *integrity and responsiveness* attributes, and modify expectations regarding the implementation of Law 20.285, improve the perception of *benevolence* of municipal public action and its technical competence, or exacerbate feelings of corruption, alienation from the authorities, and lack of competence.

The national surveys that the Transparency Council has been conducting since 2016 note a substantial improvement in the evaluation of these aspects in the set of institutions: the opinion that access to public information is necessary has grown from 65% of respondents in 2016 to 86% in 2020, an increase parallel to that of the opinion that it contributes to improving public management (44% in 2016, 66% in 2020), preventing corruption (39% - 54%) (performance factor), and encouraging participation (45% - 66%) (procedures factor). The aspect that has not changed substantially is control over the actions of public officials and authorities (53 % in 2017, 55 % in 2020, which affects both the performance and procedures factors).

In this context, the article makes a first approach to the determinants of citizen satisfaction with municipal transparency. For this purpose, the study is organized into four parts. First, the results of the 2020 National Transparency Survey are reviewed in order to identify some general characteristics of system users at the local level. Secondly, the importance of trust in the public sector as a central element in citizen evaluation of transparency management at the municipal level is stated, as well as the hypotheses of the study. Thirdly, the empirical strategy used for designing the study variables and the logistic regression procedure that made it possible to isolate the partial effect of trust in public agencies on the probability of satisfaction with municipal transparency are described. Fourth, the results of the study are presented, and a profile of the users at the local level is described. Finally, some final reflections are presented as a conclusion.

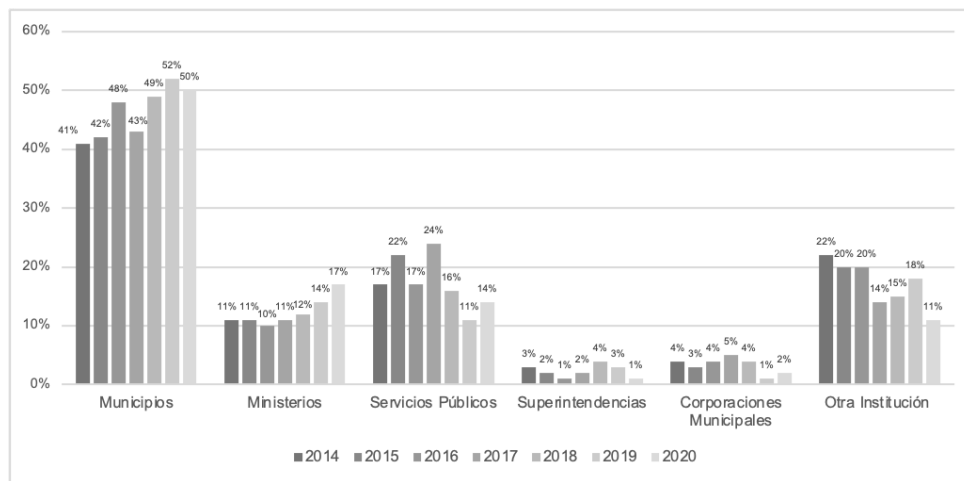
## The importance of municipalities in the management of access to information

According to the 2020 National Transparency Survey, municipalities are key actors in the management of access to information (passive transparency) at the national level. According to data from this survey, municipalities receive about 50% of the requests for access to public information (passive transparency) and 36% for active transparency (CPLT, 2021: 86, 99).

The results of the survey also show that municipalities were the entity that received the highest number of requests for access to information (passive transparency) in 2020 (Figure 1), concentrating 50% of citizen requests for public information, followed by ministries (17%), public services (14%), and other institutions (11%) (CPLT, 2021: 86).

Additionally, they are the public entity that received the highest volume of information searches through active transparency (36 %), followed by ministries (26 %), other institutions (plus those that received less than 4 %) (25 %), and public services (12 %) (CPLT, 2021: 99).

**Figure 1.**  
Information requests by type of institution



Source: Own elaboration based on the 2020 National Transparency Survey.

Figure 1 shows how municipalities are the institutions that receive the most requests for access to public information in Chile. This trend has been stable since 2014 and is significantly higher than other institutions and public services. On the other hand, although the search for information through active transparency has maintained an upward trend, it has experienced significant variations, being fourteen points below requests for access to information in 2020, contrary to what happens with ministries and other institutions, which focus more on active transparency (a difference of nine points more in the first case, and eleven points more in the second case, including municipal corporations and superintendencies). Public services generate almost equal interest in terms of active and passive transparency.



This finding of the 2020 National Transparency Survey is not minor and suggests that a higher concentration of information requests may be related to the proximity of municipalities to citizens compared to other public agencies. This feature is valued highly by citizens, who perceive municipalities as the public entity closest to their needs and requirements.

This deduction is corroborated by the statistically significant (intra-variables) data of user profiles of the two types of transparency of the set of institutions: while the profile of the person requesting access to information (the most common in municipalities) is that of a woman, aged 18 to 40 years, from socioeconomic group E, very informed, very interested in politics, with considerable interest in learning about the State, without political positioning, and with complete or incomplete studies at a professional institute or technical training centre or incomplete university studies; the profile of the person using active transparency resources (the most common in the ministries) is that of a male, aged 18 to 40 years, from socioeconomic group C1, very informed, very interested in politics, with considerable interest in learning about the State, and with complete university or postgraduate studies or, to a lesser extent, with complete or incomplete studies at a professional institute or technical training centre or incomplete university studies (CPLT, 2021: 98).

According to data from the Association of Market and Public Opinion Researchers (Asociación de Investigadores de Mercado y Opinión Pública, AIM) on which the Transparency Council bases its work, the key socioeconomic differences that mark the differentiation of profiles are, in addition to gender, educational level, and socioeconomic group, occupation, age, and health insurance (AIM, 2022): women who request public information belong mainly to the lowest socioeconomic group of unskilled workers (48%), with incomplete secondary education, complete primary education, or less (76%), with an average age of the main provider of 45 years, and 94% of them are covered by public health insurance (FONASA).

In contrast, men who actively seek information belong to the upper middle socioeconomic group C1, which, in its middle-income segment C1B (C1A and C1B are differentiated; C1B is chosen for illustration purposes), of which 53% are managers or high-level professionals, 66% have university or postgraduate studies, the average age of the main provider is 28 years, and 50% have access to private health insurance (ISAPRES), in addition to having a cell phone with a data plan (84%) and access to fixed broadband Internet (70%).

Socioeconomic group E is made up of 14.4% of Chilean households, with an average income of 361,583 Chilean pesos. Group C1 is made up of 12.3% of households, with an average income of 3,010,391 Chilean pesos for group C1A and 2,072,853 Chilean pesos for group C1B.

The different socioeconomic profiles of the people who access to either active transparency or passive transparency, and the fact that the majority of the population that has some type of interaction with the municipalities do so by requesting access to information, make it advisable to make a first approach to the determinants of citizen satisfaction with the transparency policy by focusing on the determinants of the evaluation of access to municipal information.

The experience of citizens regarding this has faced an important variation compared to previous years. There is a close relationship between the increase in the use of online channels for accessing public information and the mobility and in-person restriction measures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to data from the 2020 National Transparency Survey, the use of face-to-face channels to request information decreased from 70% to 44% during 2020 for all institutions, with a greater impact on municipalities since they are the institutions that receive most of the information requests. This was a 26-point drop that carried over to online attention through the website (24 points of growth) (CPLT, 2021: 89).

This situation could have an impact on certain groups of the population that are less skilled in the use of channels that require using electronic devices or do not have adequate means to access them, as is the case of the group of women who mostly request access to municipal information, as well as older adults and residents of isolated areas with connectivity problems, which, consequently, affect the exercise of their right to access public information.

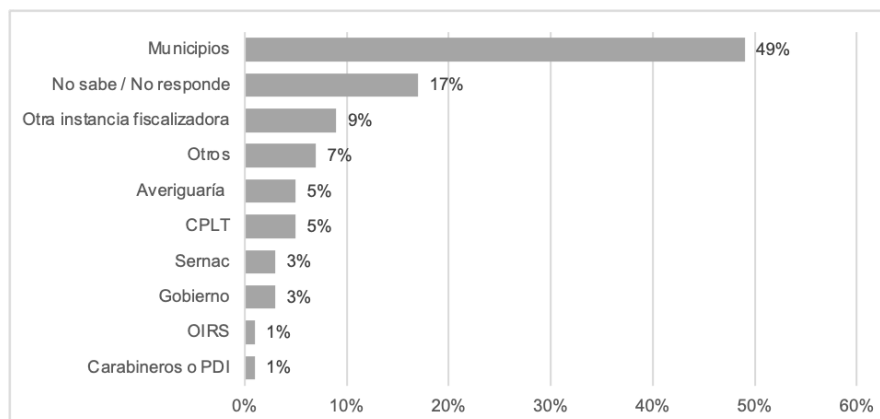
As the State institutions closest to citizens, municipalities have played a central role in the management of the pandemic and, in particular, in the access to public information related to subsidies and State benefits, certificates and administrative procedures, and housing information (CLPT, 2021: 87). The availability of public information in the municipalities' online channels on social policies or other state actions should be considered an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between citizens and the decisions of the authorities and reduce the negative perception of secrecy and acts of discretionality of public officials and public institutions.

Access to municipalities' public information can be a valid course of action to counteract other types of negative user perceptions regarding practices outside the legal frameworks at the local, clientelistic, and corruption levels, which affect the *integrity* components of trust and *values*, i.e., *benevolence*. According to the 2020 National Transparency Survey, 4% of people stated that they had witnessed or knew someone involved in corrupt actions—such as paying a bribe, giving a gift or a favour—and indicated that this was related to public officials, with 33% stating that this act took place within municipalities (CPLT, 2021: 44). This figure is the highest for a public institution headed by elected officials.

The local level is a space characterized by the proximity of citizens to state institutions. This virtuous character of the municipality is an opportunity to strengthen access to public information as an enforceable right and a *key* to other citizen rights. In this regard, the 2020 National Transparency Survey shows that 49% of the population would file a complaint to municipalities in the face of a refusal to provide public information. This result is even more interesting if we consider that only 5% would file a complaint to the Transparency Council or another oversight institution (CPLT, 2021: 69).

**Figure 2.**

Public agency where you would file your complaint in the face of a refusal to provide information



Source: Own elaboration based on the 2020 National Transparency Survey.

## Trust in the public sector as a central element of citizen evaluation of transparency at the municipal level

Trust is a central aspect of the relationship between public institutions and citizens. It is based on the expectation that public agencies act in a way that is beneficial to the population, and can promote greater cooperation with the public sector and adherence to collective norms (Marien y Hooghe, 2011).

The social context in which the study of trust in institutions and its conceptualisation, operationalisation, and measurement became relevant was marked, in the final years of the first decade of the 21st century, by the falling trust in political and economic institutions as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. The OECD launched its Trust Strategy in 2013, following its Ministerial Council on Employment, Equity and Trust, proposing methodological improvements for measuring trust (2017: 3).

In 2015, after the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations—specifically Goal 16, which is focused on trust and governance—the Praia Group was set up within its Statistical Commission to develop a statistics manual on governance. The OECD contributed to the analyses and proposals of this Group in 2017 with its OECD Guide on Measuring Trust (OCDE, 2017: 3).

The conceptualisation of government trust initiated by the OECD in 2013 was supported, among other authors, by the approach of Bouckaert (2012), who understands that trust is not something that happens to the government but something it can influence through its actions and policies; that is, it is not only about what the government does, but how it does it, for whom and with whom. In other words, when evaluating trust in the government, it is not only the results that matter, but also the processes (2013: 19-37). Bouckaert distinguishes “trust in competence” (whether the functioning of institutions

meets people's expectations of the competence of those who run them) from "trust in intentions" (whether institutions act in a way that people perceive as ethical and impartial).

The OECD defines these factors as elements of the *public governance dimension* of trust through a series of interrelated process components that encapsulate citizens' expectations: *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *openness and inclusiveness*, *integrity*, and *fairness*. As explained in the section dedicated to the literature review on transparency, responsiveness and integrity correspond to the institutional performance evaluation dimension and openness and inclusiveness to the institutional process evaluation dimension.

Of these five factors, two are directly related to public transparency policy:

- *Openness and inclusiveness*, related to the two-way communication process between governments and *stakeholders*, in which relevant and useful information is shared to improve transparency, *accountability*, and participation.
- *Integrity*, related to the public scrutiny of public action, the control of discretionality, and legality, effectiveness, and efficiency. The OECD considers it the most relevant factor for improving trust since, according to available international surveys, as the perception of corruption increases, institutional trust decreases.

Moreover, in its 2017 methodological guide, the OECD explores the extent to which existing major international surveys capture conceptual differences related to trust, both interpersonal and institutional. Therefore, it is based on the analysis of the World Values Survey (WVS): sixty-five percent of the total variance of the responses is attributable to five factors that integrate the basic conceptual constructs: institutional trust, not only in political, judicial, and security institutions but also in non-governmental institutions; and interpersonal trust, generalized to people who the respondent does not know, and limited, i.e., linked to people who the respondent does know (OCDE, 2017: 41).

From this analysis, he adopts a definition of trust that captures both interpersonal and institutional trust: "a person's belief that another person or an institution will act consistently with his or her expectations of positive behaviour" (OCDE, 2017: 42). On the one hand, it includes the person's beliefs and expectations, according to the existing literature; on the other, it links them to positive behaviour on the part of the other person or institution, that is, not only that they act in accordance with their beliefs and expectations, but also that they do so in a positive manner.

Bouckaert redefined his differentiation between *trust in competence* and *trust in intentions* as the *logic of consequences*, derived from the results of public action, and the *logic of appropriateness*, in which trust is based on the values of integrity and transparency. These definitions are adopted by the OECD as part of its Trust Framework established by its Public Governance Committee, synthesizing it into *competence* and *values* (OCDE, 2017: 42-43). The logic of consequences is operationalized through the *responsiveness* dimensions, while the logic of appropriateness does so through the operationalization of *integrity* (using power and public resources in an ethical manner) and *openness and inclusion* (informing, consulting, and listening to citizens) (OCDE, 2017: 142).

This logic is the one most closely linked to the concept of public transparency and covers the two fields of evaluation of the impact of transparency policies on institutional trust: the evaluation of the performance dimension (integrity) and of the process dimension (openness and inclusiveness) (Pastor, 2021). This dimension of trust is the one that will be taken into account in this article to test the hypotheses proposed in relation to the dependent variable, satisfaction with the information requested: the *values* dimension, of the logic of appropriateness, operationalised through the *integrity* and *openness and inclusion* factors.

*H1: Satisfaction with access to municipal information is higher among citizens who trust the public sector*

Additionally, the perception of municipal transparency may be related to certain sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status, as well as self-reported ideological orientation. The literature considers the latter as a variable that could influence citizen evaluation of public services. According to González and Carreras (2011), ideology affects this perception in two ways. On the one hand, it produces a bias in the judgment of quality made by citizens: those who declare an ideological orientation closer to the government will make a less demanding evaluation compared to those who differ ideologically from the authorities. On the other hand, ideology can affect the voting decision according to the affinity with a particular candidate and his or her proposed policies. Depending on ideological proximity, the voter may evaluate each plan differently. In addition, other studies show that people with a leftist ideological orientation tend to value the services provided by the public sector and the access to information positively (Rodríguez, Pruneda, y Cueto 2014).

*H2: The probability of being satisfied with access to municipal information is higher among citizens with a leftist ideological orientation*

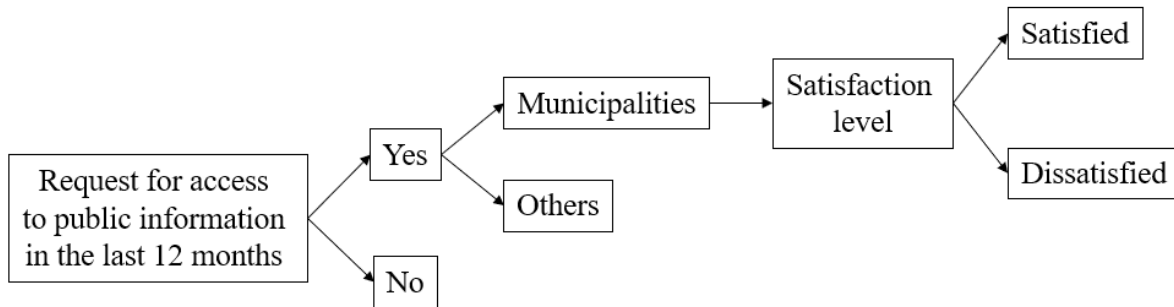
*Empirical strategy*

The study uses data from the 2020 National Transparency Survey on access to public information prepared by the Transparency Council, which aims to measure citizens' perceptions on matters related to the execution of Law 20.285. The survey uses a probabilistic three-stage cluster sampling design representative of the Chilean adult population (over ten years of age).

The dependent variable indicates whether the respondent is satisfied with the information provided in his or her last request for access to public information in a municipality. Three successive steps were carried out to design it. First, we identified the total number of people who reported having made a request for access to public information in the last 12 months (Q19. Have you requested information from a public agency in the last 12 months? Ministries, Municipalities, or others). Secondly, of those who made the request for information, only those who made the request to municipalities were included (Q20. Thinking about the last time you requested information from a public agency, what type of institution did you request it from?). Thirdly, the level of satisfaction with the information provided was asked, and a value of 1 was assigned to those who said they were "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" and 0 to those who said they were "Very dissatisfied" or "Dissatisfied" (Q23. How satisfied were you with the information you were given?).

**Figure 3.**

Strategy used in the development of the dependent variable



Source: Own elaboration

The independent variables of interest were: trust in the public sector and ideology of the respondents. Both variables were taken from the 2020 National Transparency Survey and are measured on a scale of 1 to 10.

In addition, a series of sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status observed, and residence area (urban or rural), were used as statistical controls. Age is a numerical variable ranging from 18 to 82 years; gender is a dichotomous variable where 1 is male and 2 is female; socioeconomic status is ordinal and grouped into 6 categories, where 1 indicates AB or high class and 6 indicates E or marginal class; and area of residence is a dichotomous variable where 1 is urban and 2 is rural, according to the codebook of the National Transparency Survey. Table 1 summarizes the main descriptive statistics of the selected variables.

**Table 1.**

Descriptive statistics of the selected variables

Variable	Question	N	Mean	SD.	Min.	Max.
Satisfaction Level	Own elaboration	362	NA	NA	0	1
Gender	What is your gender?	362	NA	NA	1	2
Age	How old are you?	362	46,69	15,74	18	82
Residence area	Residence area (urban or rural)	362	NA	NA	1	2
Socioeconomic status	SEG observed	362	NA	NA	1	6
Trust in the public sector	In general, how much do you trust the public sector?	362	4,01	2,41	1	10
Ideology	People usually talk about “left” and “right” in politics. On a scale where “0” is “left” and “10” is “right”, where would you place yourself? __	362	5,64	2,53	1	10

Source: Own elaboration based on the 2020 National Transparency Survey.

The analytical strategy used is based on a model where the response or dependent variable is categorical (binary). For this purpose, a logit link function was used given the binomial distribution of the dependent variable. The decision to use a logit model over probit models is based on the fact that the former offers a substantial advantage: it allows us to calculate *odds* ratios from which it is possible to compare the magnitude of the probability given different values of our independent variables (Agresti, 2007; Long, 1997). In other words, we will be able to identify those constant effects of the variables of interest on the probability of success or of users being satisfied with the information provided by the municipalities.

The estimated model is as follows:

Where is the probability of being satisfied with the response received by individual  $i$ .

## Results

Before presenting the results of the statistical model, it is pertinent to note some descriptive patterns in the data. This information will provide us with a first approximation of the characteristics of the citizens who access municipal information.

### User profile at the municipal level

The first element of the users' profile of access to public information at the municipal level is their age, which has four central elements. First, there is a relatively homogeneous distribution between 18

and 55 years of age. This could indicate that those requesting public information at the local level are an economically active population. This finding is consistent with what was observed by the Transparency Council, which suggests that users of the law at the municipal level mainly use this right to request information on subsidies, bonds, and public services in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

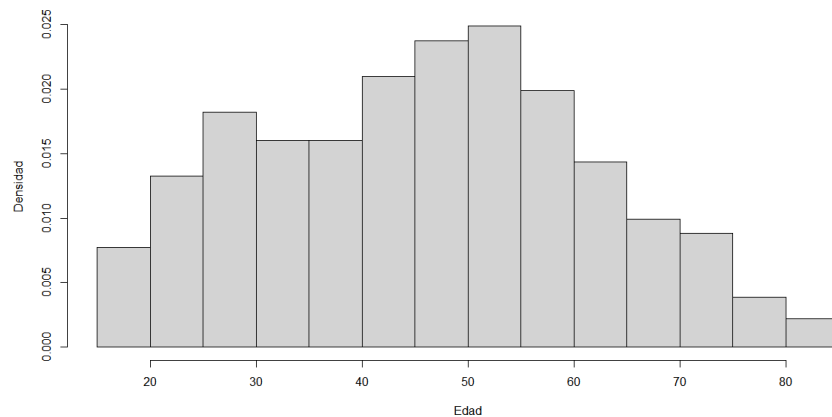
Secondly, there is a higher concentration of citizens aged between 40 and 55 years old who make use of the right to access public information.

Thirdly, the data indicate that the youngest group of the population is not the age group with the most requests for public information at the local level. This could be counterintuitive given the digital advantages of this group of users; however, considering the hypothesis of the Transparency Council Report about a higher number of requests related to subsidies and social benefits, it is possible that this group accesses such information through other means without requiring these channels.

Lastly, the elderly population constitutes the smallest group of users of the system, with fewer requests than the rest of the age groups. The decrease in active users is significant as the age of the respondents increases; specifically, from the age of 60 onwards, there is a consistent drop. This may be explained by the digital gap of this group and the mobility restrictions related to the Covid-19 health emergency, which could be hindering the access to and exercise of this right for certain groups of the population (See Figure 4).

#### Figure 4.

Age distribution of users requesting public information at the municipal level



Source: Own elaboration based on the 2020 National Transparency Survey.

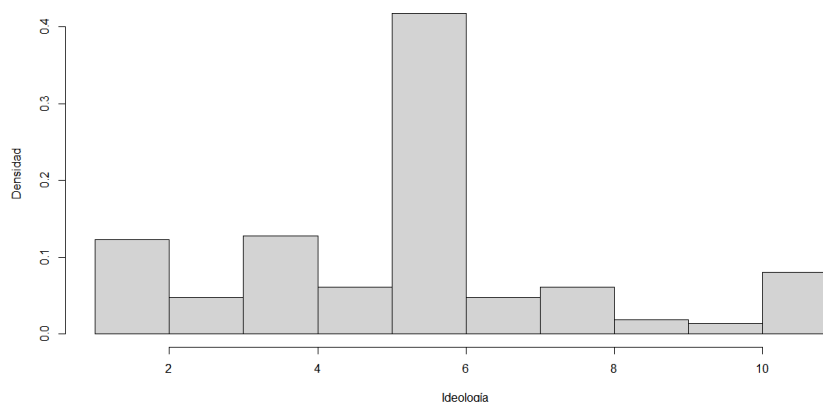
The second general characteristic of the users is their ideological distribution. According to data from the National Transparency Survey, most of those who request public information at the municipal level state that they have a centrist ideological orientation (41%). This distribution is consistent with that reported by the rest of the population and suggests that ideology may not be a sensitive element of citizens when exercising their right to access public information. Likewise,



although there is a slight difference in favour of those who declare themselves leftists over those who report a greater affinity with the political right, this is not significant and reinforces the previous analysis (See Figure 5).

### Figure 5.

Ideology distribution among users requesting public information at the municipal level



*Source: Own elaboration based on the 2020 National Transparency Survey.*

The next step in building a profile is to compare the sociodemographic characteristics of users accessing information at the municipal level. Based on this, a relevant finding is that most users are women, concentrating 68.2% of the public information requests to municipalities during 2020. Their average age is 49 years, they reside in urban areas, and belong mainly to the lower-middle socioeconomic group (40.9%) and the lower socioeconomic group (38.9%).

In the case of men, they are slightly younger compared to women, with an average age of 47 years; they reside in urban areas; and belong to the lower-middle socioeconomic group. They account for 36.5% of the requests to access public information at the municipal level.

An interesting finding is that, both in the case of men and women, there are no users of access to information (passive transparency) belonging to the upper socioeconomic group. Once again, this is consistent with the hypothesis put forward by the Transparency Council about a greater exercise of the right in the groups most affected by the Covid-19 health situation, who identify the municipalities as the closest public institution to respond to their needs and well-being requirements.

### Determinants of user satisfaction at the local level

The increase in requests for access to public information at the municipal level during the Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of municipal transparency. What factors determine satisfaction with transparency at the local level? How does trust in the public sector impact citizen evaluation of municipal transparency management? Table 2 shows the results of a logistic regression analysis where satisfaction with municipal transparency is the dependent variable.

**Table 2.**

Determinants of citizen satisfaction with transparency at the municipal level

<b>Dependent Variable:</b>		
<b>Satisfaction with Municipal transparency</b>		
	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>
Women	-0,245 (0,247)	-0,257 (0,343)
Rural	0,231 (0,312)	0,303 (0,442)
Age	-0,006 (0,007)	0,018* (0,010)
Trust in the public sector		0,316*** (0,080)
Ideology		-0,034 (0,064)
C2 SES (middle class)		0,799 (0,980)
C3 SES (lower-middle class)		0,109 (0,947)
D SES (lower class)		0,646 (0,961)
E SES (marginal)		-14,700 (882,744)
Intercept	1,161*** (0,391)	-0,755 (0,673)
Observations	362	211
Log Likelihood	-227,254	-114,057
Akaike Inf. Crit.	462,509	240,114

Evidence suggests that satisfaction with transparency at the municipal level is higher in those users who have greater trust in the public sector (model 2). The regression coefficient is statistically significant and positive, consistent with the study hypothesis.

The goodness-of-fit method employed is the one used for this type of categorical dependent variables models: statistics such as 2: Log-likelihood<sup>6</sup> and Akaike, including deviance. These statistical tests compare the fitted model with a null model where the predictive variables are not incorporated, that is, whether or not incorporating the independent variables of interest improves the ability to predict the probability of being satisfied with transparency at the municipal level.

The log-likelihood statistic shows that as we get closer to the fitted model (value 0), the model improves. Model 1 has a worse fit compared to the model with the explanatory variable of interest. In addition, it was decided to include a measure of model efficacy by predicting the response variable. For this purpose, the chi-square statistic was used, which measures the difference between the model in its current state and the model when only the constant was included. The test result shows that the probability associated with the statistic is 0.001229769, which is significantly less than 0.05, so we can reject the null hypothesis that model 2 (with the independent variable of interest) is better at predicting the response variable than if it had been chosen at random.

In general, the results of model 2 indicate that as trust in the public sphere increases, the probability of being satisfied with municipal transparency also increases, while the rest of the variables remain constant. In substantive terms, for each additional point on the scale of trust in the public sector (1 to 10), the probability of being satisfied with the information received by the municipalities increases by 0.77. This effect is statistically significant at 0.001 (see Figure 6).

Similarly, the results show no evidence in favour of hypothesis 2. As can be seen in model 2, the ideology of users suggests that as we move to the right, satisfaction with the public information provided is lower. However, the partial effect described is indistinguishable from zero and, therefore, not statistically significant.

An interesting finding is the partial effect of age on the probability that users are satisfied with transparency at the municipal level (model 2). This effect is statistically significant at 90% confidence. Although this variable was considered a statistical control, the results indicate that as age increases, the probability of being satisfied with the public information received at the municipal level increases as well.

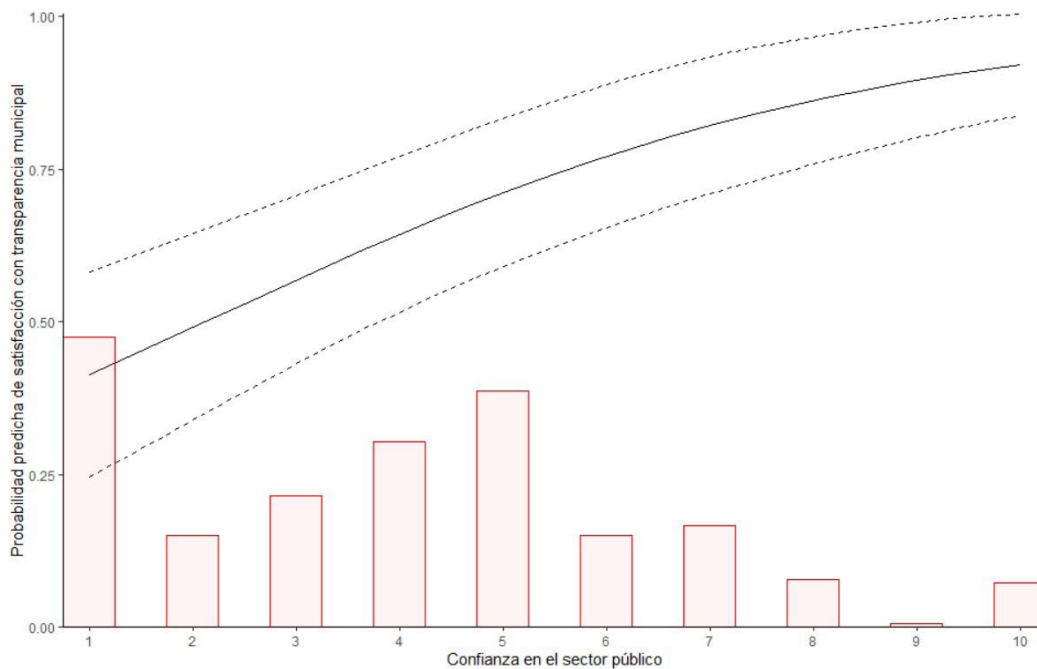
In other words, the results suggest that young people are more demanding when evaluating the information received by municipal administrations than older people. However, this effect should be moderated by the practical implications of citizen satisfaction, as 18-year-olds have a 39% probability of being satisfied with the response to their request, and the oldest persons observed in the sample (82 years old) have a 67% probability. Ultimately, although age produces a considerable increase in the probability of observing satisfied users, such an increase, in practical terms, is less significant.

The log-likelihood statistic is an indicator of how much unexplained information remains in the dependent variable after fitting the model. A higher log-likelihood value indicates a worse model fit; the higher the value, the more unexplained variability remains in the model. The perfect fit should take the value of 0. The overall goodness-of-fit of the model is assessed through the deviance (-2 times the log-likelihood): in this case, the deviance of the null model is  $-2LL=250.08$ ; however, when we add “trust”, this value is reduced to 222.74, which tells us that, with this variable, the model improves in predicting whether someone is satisfied with transparency at the municipal level.

Finally, the independent variable, Socioeconomic Group (SEG), has no statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. Therefore, the incorporation of sociodemographic variables in the model, which are present in the literature, either does not have a statistically significant partial effect on the dependent variable of the study or its effect is very small (Age). That is, since no effect of these control variables is found, the rival hypotheses suggesting that satisfaction with transparency or other public services could be explained by sociodemographic variables are rejected.

**Figure 6.**

Predicted probability of satisfaction with municipal transparency according to trust in the public sector



*Source: Own elaboration based on the 2020 National Transparency Survey.*

Figure 2 shows predicted probability based on the observed values of citizen trust in the public sector, together with a histogram to visualize the density of responses according to each option. Based on this information, it is possible to draw some general lessons about the relationship between trust in public institutions and citizen satisfaction with municipal transparency.

First, the likelihood of being satisfied with municipal transparency increases steadily as citizens trust public agencies more. On the contrary, when citizen trust in the public sector is low, it is more likely that the user will feel dissatisfied with the information provided at the municipal level..

A simple way to understand this effect is to compare the predicted probabilities for different values of trust in the public sector while all the other variables remain constant. For example, if we compare the satisfaction of a citizen who strongly distrusts the public sector (score of 1 on the 2020 National Transparency Survey scale) with one who has medium trust (score of 4 on the scale), we see that satisfaction with municipal transparency increases by 24 percentage points (from 26% to 48%,

respectively). This difference is more acute if we contrast the predicted probability between those who fully trust public institutions (score of 10 on the scale) and those who do not (score of 1 on the index): in the first case, the probability of satisfaction with the information provided by local governments is 86%, while among those who distrust the public sector, it is 26%. In other words, satisfaction with municipal transparency increases by 60 percentage points.

Secondly, the effect tends to be less pronounced in those citizens who show high values of trust compared to those who show low values in the trust indicator. In other words, although trust shows a significant effect at all levels, its impact on satisfaction with municipal transparency is less significant among citizens who are close to total trust, i.e., above 7 on the scale used. This is due to the compression effect around the mean values and the sigmoid curve of the models with binary dependent variable, which is demonstrated by comparing the effect of trust between people with values of 8 and 9, where the probability of being satisfied increases by only 3% (see the upper part of the curve in Figure 6).

## Conclusions

Municipalities are some of the most important public institutions for the quality of life of the population. A greater proximity between the inhabitants of the territory and the public authorities leads to a better understanding of the needs of the communities and a capacity to respond accordingly. In this relationship, municipal transparency and access to public information are essential to reinforce the positive aspects of a territory-oriented management. However, the availability of information is not a guarantee of the positive aspects of transparency *per se*. Citizens' evaluation of their interactions with the public sector should be considered when designing new mechanisms for evaluating transparency management systems at the municipal level (Islam, 2006).

For transparency to promote virtuous relationships between citizens, public institutions, and authorities, the information provided by these agencies must be valued effectively by citizens. A positive experience of municipal transparency could (re)activate this relationship and enhance the benefits of an open government.

This study was able to evaluate the relationship between trust in the public sector and satisfaction with municipal transparency. It is interesting to note that those who show higher satisfaction with the information received have higher trust in the role of the public sector. This higher institutional trust is largely explained by a positive evaluation of the *openness and inclusiveness* municipal attribute, by the very fact of requesting information, obtaining a response, and the satisfaction with this response, and with the *integrity* attribute, by the opportunity in this process to contrast the ethical orientation of the institution in its use of the public resources of interest (benefits and services linked to the Covid-19 situation, in a specific moment, and those linked to the provision of educational and health services). That is, to positively evaluate the *logic of appropriateness*, both in its procedural and performance aspects, which is corroborated by data from the national transparency studies of the Transparency Council that note a substantial improvement in the evaluation of these

aspects since 2016: preventing corruption, which belongs to the *integrity* factor (39 % - 54 %); and encouraging participation, which belongs to the *openness and inclusiveness* factor (45 % - 66 %).

Cunill (2006) states that one of the basic requirements for transparency to fulfil its social control and oversight mission is that the information provided must be reliable and high quality. The rest of the variance in the satisfaction variable may be due to these intrinsic factors—timeliness, reliability, etc.—or also to other components of trust evaluation, for example, interpersonal trust, given the closeness and proximity of the relationships established between citizens, employees, and municipal representatives.

This suggests that users' evaluation could be shaped by previous experiences or situations that have affected their trust in public institutions, including the municipalities themselves. Although it is not possible to say for sure what the mechanism behind this relationship is, it is plausible to assume that higher trust positively affects citizens' perceptions of the response to their requirements. Ultimately, the evidence presented is consistent with hypothesis 1 of the study.

Regarding the effect of ideology on citizen evaluation of municipal transparency, the study did not find evidence to assert the existence of a relationship. Instead, the results suggest that ideology does not have a systematic impact on levels of satisfaction with municipal transparency management. These results are consistent with some applied research on citizen perception of services at local levels (González and Carreras, 2011). At this level, regardless of the ideology of the citizens, a positive evaluation of the provision of services by local administrations is observed. Proximity to the communities and their immediate needs appears to be a key asset in this evaluation.

The importance of evaluating satisfaction with municipal transparency lies in identifying how citizens perceive the implementation of the right to access public information and those factors that determine users' opinions. However, how the two affect satisfaction with municipal transparency is different. On the one hand, it is possible that older people report higher satisfaction than younger people due to a preference for face-to-face consultation channels, who could be valuing the direct and decisive attention to their questions, which implies a less intensive use of time for the municipal officials in charge. On the contrary, the fact that younger segments of the population report lower satisfaction could be related to the use of online channels that dilute the proximity of the municipality as a virtuous aspect of its relationship with citizens. Thus, the impersonal nature of responses to requests for public information, the impossibility of an instant reply, and the delay in the management of responses might be underlying elements of this relationship between lower satisfaction and age.

On the other hand, the trust in public agencies and a higher probability of satisfaction with transparency at the municipal level might be associated with a self-selection of requesters, which could be biasing this relationship observed. In other words, those who trust the public sector less have a lower predisposition to go to public agencies to solve their needs or, regardless of the response obtained, their evaluation is negative.

In both cases, the study is unable to address these types of questions that require a more detailed analysis of the transparency situation at the municipal level. However, the results presented here provide some

insights for a research agenda on transparency at the local level and other relevant questions that require further applied studies with multiple data sources.

Finally, a positive evaluation of municipal transparency management is a central aspect for the management of public information at the local level. The mere existence of this right should not be considered a condition that automatically ensures good governance, better accountability, strengthened communication between the authorities and the citizenry, active control of decisions by the population, or other virtues associated with transparency. The access to public information requires decisive actions on the part of those who administer it in such a way that it meets the criteria of timeliness, quality, and completeness. Only in this way will it be possible to conceive transparency as an effective tool available to citizens.

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