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Linking democratic preferences and political participation: Evidence from Germany

Abstract

An extensive body of literature discusses the disaffection of citizens with representative democracy and highlights increasing citizens' preferences for political decision-makers beyond elected politicians. But so far, little research has been conducted to analyze the relations between citizens' respective preferences and their political behavior. To address this void in the literature, our article investigates the extent to which citizens' preferences for certain political decision-makers (politicians, citizens, or expert) have an impact on their retrospective and prospective political participation. Our analysis draws on data from a survey conducted in autumn of 2014 on a probability representative sample in Germany. Results indicate that respondents favoring politicians as decision-makers focus mainly on voting. Those who favor citizens as decision-makers are more willing to get involved in participatory procedures, while those inclined towards expert decision-making show mixed participation.

Keywords: democracy, citizens' preferences, political decision-makers, political participation, Germany.

Introduction

Political scientists have examined the relations between political attitudes and actions for several decades (Almond & Verba 1965; Kinder & Sears 1985; Bolzendahl & Coffé 2013) arguing that the two go in hand (Quintelier & van Deth 2014, p.153). At the same time, citizens' disaffection with institutions and actors of representative democracy (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2001; Font & Alarcón 2011; Norris 2011; Bengtsson 2012) are leading to an increasing endorsement of political decision-makers beyond elected representatives. Some authors expect that these "changing norms" might reinforce certain types of political action (Dalton 2008, p.78). But in spite of a rich debate in these fields, the question of how preferences for various political decision-makers (politicians, citizens, experts) are linked with certain modes of political participation has just recently emerged.

Social sciences have studied factors influencing citizens' political participation intensively. However, little is known whether and how their preferences, considering political decision-makers is linked to their political involvement. Recently, more and more scholars are examining citizens' concepts of democracy as well their preferences for certain

political decision-making procedures or decision-makers. Yet, these scholars were less interested in the effects of these preferences on citizens participation (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2001; Bengtsson & Christensen 2014). Our article aims to shed light on this connection and investigates how citizens' notions about who should make political decisions correlate with their involvement in different forms of retrospective and prospective participation. With this approach the article bridges current debates on citizens' conceptions of democracy (Canache 2012; Shin 2015) with the established body of research on political participation. In this sense, the article has broader empirical implications for the functioning of representative democracy and its future and it will improve our understanding of political behavior and provide novel scientific knowledge about determinants of political participation. The results show how the changing preferences of citizens for decision-makers beyond elected representatives are likely to influence their form of participation substantially, which in turn will affect the development of contemporary democracy. At the same time, the findings bear implications for the real world of politics where civic and political education agents could learn about drivers for democratic mobilization and involvement.

In spite of the high significance of this topic, only isolated studies have addressed this question explicitly. Research on the relation between people's normative preferences and their retrospective or prospective activities is more widespread in other sub-disciplines of social sciences.¹ In particular, research on environmental and health sociology examines this connection thoroughly. Studies on environmental behavior for example, revealed differences between normative preferences and actions: many people endorse the normative concept that environmental protection is crucial, but this does only partly lead to a willingness to take specific environment protecting actions. The correlation between normative preferences and corresponding actions is low (de Haan & Kuckartz 1996, p.107; Diekmann & Preisendoerfer 1998). In contrast, research in social psychology has shown that normative preferences sometimes go hand in hand with the willingness to act according to these preferences (Darley & Batson 1973; Seligman & Katz 1996; McCarty & Shrum 2000;

¹ We leave out the debate on the impact of low/high costs on activities (Diekmann & Preisendoerfer 1998). Our focus on normative aspects is based on the assumption that the model of cost-benefit analysis is incomplete explaining political participation (Whiteley 1995).

Sniderman et al. 2001).² How are now citizens' political preferences and their political participation connected?

To answer this question we focus on citizens' preferences for political decision-makers (politicians, citizens, experts), which are linked to currently prominent models of democracy (representative, participatory, expert) (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2001; Esaiasson et al. 2012; Bengtsson & Christensen 2014), and on four modes of political participation closely related to these preferences: voting, protests, referendums, and consultative procedures. We hypothesize that citizens' preferences for certain political decision-makers correlate with their degrees of involvement in particular modes of participation. We expect for example, that citizens with a preference for decision-making by citizens are willing to participate more active in referendums than citizens with a preference for representatives as political decision-makers, who are instead more inclined to limit their political activity to the selection of representatives.

The article starts with a section about the state of the art and three testable hypotheses. The second section briefly describes the research design and data. Next, we analyze and interpret our findings on the basis of descriptive and inferential statistics. The conclusion summarizes the key findings, discusses the major theoretical implications, and reflects on avenues for further research.

Linking democratic preferences and political participation

The question whether and how citizens' preferences for specific normative concepts correlate with their actual as well as intended behavior was until recently a neglected topic within political science. With Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) this questions starts to come on the radar of political science – however at a very slow pace. In their study about the US, they showed how citizens' support for more participative models of democracy did not necessarily imply increased willingness to get politically involved. Scholars on public opinion and democratic innovations picked up these findings - sometimes with astonishment. Among the few researchers who followed the routes started by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, Bengtsson and Christensen (2014) are of main interest. Looking at Finnish citizens, they

² Within sociology, the study of LaPiere (1934) on racial prejudice identified the gap between attitudes and behaviours as well.

identified “a distinct association between citizens’ ideals and the actions they take”. Citizens supporting a representative concept of democracy are more inclined to vote. Among supporters of a participatory concept of democracy they found “higher rates of involvement”, and citizens supporting decision-making by experts “are less active in all forms of participation” (Bengtsson and Christensen 2014, p.13).

Some studies discussed the link between norms and participation from a slightly different angle. Canache (2012, p.1150) examined in a cross-national study based on survey data (2006–2007, Latin American) “whether variance in conceptualizations of democracy matters for patterns in civic engagement”. The results were that “the structure and content of democratic conceptualizations both matter for citizens’ attitudes and patterns of political participation” (Canache 2012, p.1149). Geissel (2008) as well as Bolzendahl and Coffe (2013) were interested in the links between citizenship norms and political participation. Geissel (2008) illustrated that citizens supporting the norm of political attentiveness (“monitoring politicians as civic duty”) are more inclined to participate in political will-formation and decision-making. Similarly Bolzendahl and Coffe (2013, p.45; 60) showed that citizens’ norms about what it means to be a ‘good citizen’ are strong predictors for their engagement in different modes of political participation: “citizenship norms are central to explaining variation in participation”.

Retrospective vs. prospective participation and availability of participatory options

Apart from these efforts, political science research on the connections between citizens’ preferences for certain political decisions-makers and their political participation is still rare. Two research gaps are particularly striking. While studies about political participation often differentiated between retrospective (already accomplished) and prospective (planned for the future)³ participation, this differentiation was never considered in research on the relations between citizens’ norms and democratic preferences on the one hand and their political participation on the other hand. Yet, we assume that retrospective and prospective participation – also because the availability of participatory procedures might not always be available. This up to now neglected question, the question of availability, might nevertheless

³ Standard questions in respective surveys ask for example, whether citizens had cast their votes in the past and whether they plan to cast their vote in future elections.

be crucial. Citizens might be willing to get involved in different modes of participation, which have not yet been available.⁴ Within social science several sub-disciplines have scrutinized the relation between normative preferences and action taking ‘availability tools’ for the respective action into account.

Studies in the context of health sociology are especially instructive. Various studies in this field have shown that people act more often according to their normative disposition, if respective opportunities are provided. There is, for example, a strong correlation between the availability of sport facilities and sportive activities: sport intention was “more strongly associated with sports participation when sports facilities were more readily available” (Prins et al. 2010; see also Powell et al. 2007). This might also be true in the world of political involvement. Citizens might be willing to participate in different forms of participation (referendums, consultative dialog-oriented procedures), but these opportunities might not be provided within their country. For example, a citizen with preference for citizens as decisive political decision-maker is willing to participate in direct democratic procedures, but these opportunities are not available in the polity she lives. She can in retrospective only report that she has never taken part in any direct democratic procedure – this option was never available – but would be willing to participate – if the opportunity is offered.

Preferences for different political decision-makers and modes of participation

In line with recent literature (Bengtsson & Christensen 2014; Coffé & Michels 2014) our study refers in a parsimonious way to three currently most discussed models of decision-making with three different decisive decision-makers, i.e. elected politicians, citizens or experts. In the *representative* model, political representatives are considered as the main actors of political will-formation and decision-making. From this perspective, any involvement additional to the selection of the representatives is neither expected nor intended. After the election, citizens are expected not to bother with political issues but to leave these matters to their representatives (Schumpeter 1956, p.295). Citizens favoring politicians as decision-makers are most likely convinced that it is a citizen’s democratic duty

⁴ This approach does not insinuate that intentions are necessarily transformed into action, but takes into account that availability of participatory opportunities plus intention to participate can lead to actual political activity. The actual correlation between availability, intention and activity is still a matter of further research.

to take part in elections, but to abstain from political activities after and between elections. Other modes of citizens' participation are from this perspective neither necessary nor useful.

In contrast, most *participatory* models put more emphasis on citizens as main political decision-makers. They are based on the idea that political representatives do not always provide the best political solutions and that citizens should have more say and more decision-making competence (e.g. Mendelsohn & Parkinson 2001; Setala & Schiller 2009).⁵ Citizens would know best about their interests and needs and are therefore the best decision-makers. Different modes of political participation beyond elections fall into this category, such as participation in referendums, but also in consultations or in demonstrations.

Finally, the *expert model* of decision-making gained some prominence. This model assumes that nonpartisan, politically independent experts are the best choice for making political decisions, because they would not be involved in competitions driven by cravings for power or ideological rivalries. Experts would govern wisely grounded in science, rationality, and objective knowledge – with citizens remaining in the background. Although these decision-makers can be considered as non-democratic, this model is endorsed by many citizens living in democratic systems and supporting democratic values (e.g. Rapeli 2015).

Irrespective of the model of democracy and preferred decision-maker, *participation* is always the backbone. However, the different models advocate different modes of participation and we will focus in our study on voting, use of referendums, dialog-oriented consultation, and protest as the main forms.⁶ Voting as selection of political representatives is the theoretically most important mode of participation and also empirically the most widespread political activity. In some countries the use of referendums as procedure of political decision-making has become established as well, e.g. in Switzerland. As a means to involve citizens in political will-formation, consultative, dialog-oriented procedures such as

⁵ Other participatory models emphasize citizens' involvement in political consultation (will-formation) with political representatives being responsible for the final decision-making. They endorse citizens' participation in consultative, dialogue-oriented procedures. Thompson (2008, p.512) notes that "to the standard list of political activities in which citizens participate—voting, organizing, protesting—add deliberating." (see also (Mendelsohn & Parkinson 2001)

⁶ Several typologies of political participation exist, e.g. Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969), Milbrath's typology about gladiator-spectator-apatetic citizens (1965) or Norris' differentiation (2002). In our study we move beyond these typologies and relate preferences for decision-makers with modes of participation.

Consensus Conferences or Citizen Panels have proliferated all over the world. Finally, protest has always been a way for citizens to influence political will-formation and decision-making.

In line with these arguments, we expect that citizens' preferences for certain decision-makers are linked to their actual political involvement and to their willingness to get politically involved. Similar to Bengtsson and Christensen (2014) we anticipate citizens preferring representatives as political decision-makers to be active in elections. Since selection of representatives is considered as the main civic duty, voting is most likely the one and only political activity and intention of these citizens. Respondents preferring citizens as decision-makers will show a different profile and will not restrict their activities to the selection of political representatives, but are active in referendums, in consultative procedures and in protest.⁷ Finally, citizens preferring the experts as main political decision-makers might be neither interested in selecting their political representatives nor in any political activities concerning political will-formation or decision-making. It can be assumed that they have a tendency to withdraw from political activities altogether. Based on these arguments we formulate three general hypotheses.

H1: Citizens preferring politicians as political decisions-makers engage mainly in electoral participation (i.e. voting) and hardly in non-electoral forms of participation.

H2: Citizens preferring citizens as political decision-makers engage not only in electoral but also in non-electoral forms of participation.

H3: Citizens preferring experts as political decision-makers engage neither in electoral nor in non-electoral forms of participation.

At this point we do not differentiate between the effects on retrospective and prospective political participation, but merely assume that the availability of participatory procedures shows some influence. We will empirically check to what extent this is the case by conducting separate analyses.

⁷ Protest can be related either to representative or to participatory democracy. We assume that citizens who are active in protest can either prefer citizens as political decision-makers. Or they can prefer representatives as decision-makers, but are dissatisfied with the responsiveness of the political representatives and raise their voice to influence the political decision on a specific issue without interest in comprehensive participatory opportunities.

Control variables

In addition to these considerations, our analysis accounts for two major categories of control variables: 1) resources and skills and 2) availability of participatory opportunities. A high level of individual resources and skills will make it more likely to transform normative preferences into behavioral intentions and to translate intentions into activity. Thus, we include the standard control variables known as important drivers for political participation – income, education, age (Millbrath & Goel 1978; Dalton 1988; Conway 1991; Verba et al. 1995), civic engagement (Verba & Nie 1972; Rosenstone & Hansen 1993; Putnam 2000), political interest (Norris 2000) and news consumption (Putnam 2000). We expect respondents with a high socio-economic status, active in the civil society, with a high interest towards political issues, and heavy news consumers to be more prone to political participation. We also control for the availability of participatory opportunities because this may influence both the retrospective and prospective mode of participation.

Figure 1 about here

Research design and descriptive statistics

To test the hypotheses, we use individual level data from a national survey conducted in August-September 2014 by the GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. The GESIS Panel is a mixed-mode (online and mail) omnibus access panel representative for the German speaking population residing in Germany and aged between 18 and 70 years. The survey was carried out in 2014 and included a specific one-wave battery of questions about preferences for certain political decision-makers and modes of political participation, proposed by the authors of this article. A total number of 3,983 respondents answered the questions used to operationalize the variables of this study. The “do not know” and “no answer” options were treated as missing values and excluded from analysis.

Germany is an appropriate context to investigate the connection between democratic preferences and participation for several reasons. In terms of participatory behavior, Germany plays in the middle field compared with other EU member states (European Social Survey 2012). Looking at subnational popular votes within European countries, Germany is currently one of the leading countries. Popular vote can be launched

top-down, i.e. by authorities, or bottom-up, i.e. by citizens, either to “correct” a decision of the local council or to put a topic on the political agenda. At institutional level, the country provides different modes of participatory options at subnational level, i.e. direct democratic decision-making and will-formation procedures. Germany is a federal state with 16 states and the options for direct democratic decision-making vary from state to state (see Appendix for detailed information); these will allow us to test for the concept of availability.

Although our study has some similarities with the Finnish case study described above, it does not intend to compare Germany and Finland. At the same time, we do not replicate the Finnish work but apply a particular theoretical framing. Our analysis is guided by a different research question, different operationalization of normative preferences, survey questions and sampling, and consequently different data. However, our study allows us to confirm whether some observations in Finland were country specific or can be found elsewhere. Our long-term intention beyond this article is to strive towards generalizations and our study makes a step in that direction. The existence of similar results in two countries with institutional differences (e.g. unitary vs. federal structure, multiparty vs. two-party government, or semi-presidential vs. parliamentary system) increases the robustness of findings in each study.

Operationalization and descriptive findings

We are interested in four modes of political participation: voting as a feature of representative democracy, referendums, consultative procedures and protest. The use of different forms of political participation (retrospective) is measured through the answers given to the following question: “So far, using a scale from 1 to 6 (where 1 = never, 6 = very often), which of the following activities did you undertake: a) Voting b) Participate in referendum, c) Participate in protest/demonstrate and d) Participate in participatory budgeting or other kinds of consultations?”. The order of these forms was not random, but started with the most popular form of participation. Similarly, the desire to use political participation (prospective) is measured through the answers provided to the question: “Using a scale from 1 to 6 (where 1 = never, 6 = very often), which of the following activities would you be willing to undertake: a) Voting b) Participate in referendum, c) Participate in

protest/demonstrate and d) Participate in participatory budgeting or other kinds of political consultations?”⁸

The distribution of respondents on the modes of political participation is depicted in Figures 3 (retrospective) and 4 (prospective). The vertical axis indicates the percentage of respondents, while the horizontal axis presents the degree of participation that ranges from “never” to “very often”. In Figure 2 it is not surprising to observe that voting is the most popular mode of political participation with almost 75% of the respondents doing this activity very often. At the other extreme, participation in consultative, dialogue-oriented procedures has been never done by 63% of respondents and only 2% did it very often. Participation in referendums is the second most popular form of retrospective political participation with approximately one quarter of the German respondents being engaged on a regular basis. Yet, since referendums are allowed only at the subnational level⁹ (and not at national) some respondents never had the opportunity to participate in a referendum, if referendums were not organized in the area where they live. The same reasoning applies to consultative, dialogue-oriented tools, for example Participatory Budgeting, in which generally only a very small percentage of the citizenry, around one percent, take part (Geissel et al. 2015). With the exception of referendums where the distribution is relatively balanced, the other three forms of participation do not have great variation. A large share of the population clusters into one category: ‘very often’ for voting plus ‘never’ for consultations or protests.

Figure 2 about here

The distribution of prospective political participation (Figure 3) shows some similarities to the one about retrospective participation. Voting is again the most popular forms of

⁸ Another possibility to approach political participation is to conceptualize it as modes of participants as opposed to modes of participation. Our choice for the latter is driven by our interest in the frequency of participation in the various forms and does not allow to predict the extent citizens participate politically in a specific way. Moreover, there is an empirical problem when checking for particular modes of participants because many Germans vote (Figure 2) and thus the majority of respondents are clustered in the modes involving voting and very few in modes that exclude voting, i.e. skewed distribution.

⁹ There is no data available whether citizens differentiate between models of democracy at the subnational and the national level. However, previous research indicates that the models of democracy are rather consistent and do not vary across political levels (Vetter 2007).

participation with more than 70% of the German respondents declaring that they will vote very often in the future and almost 50% declaring that they will participate in referendums very often. However, there are also some noticeable differences. The comparison between referendum percentages – retrospective involvement compared with the willingness to participate in the future – reveals an optimistic attitude towards this form of participation. For example, 30% of the respondents declare that they never participated in a referendum but only 7% answer that they will never do that in the future. The positive attitudes towards prospective political participation can be also observed in the case of consultative procedures where 63% of the respondents have never participated but only 23% reject the possibility to participate for the future. These observations strengthen the idea that the (non-)existence of referendums or consultative procedures in the politics of the respondents may have an influence on the distribution of retrospective forms. Accordingly, there appear to be several instances in which respondents wanted to participate but some modes of participation were not available to them. In light of this evidence we expect the hypothesized relationships to be stronger for prospective participation.

Figure 3 about here

Considering the preferences for certain political decision-makers (politicians, citizens or experts) we asked respondents to choose on a six-point continuum between these decision-makers, taken two by two. More precisely, the respondents were asked the following question: “Who should make important policy decisions? Please indicate the number on the scale from 1 to 6 that is closest to your opinion”. This was a matrix question that asked respondents to make three choices between I. Citizens (1) and Elected politicians (6); II. Elected politicians (1) and Politically independent experts (6); III. Politically independent experts (1) and Citizens (6). The distribution of the respondents’ answers on their preferred political decision-maker is summarized in Table 1. It indicates a fairly limited amount of respondents choosing the extreme points of the provided continuum with a minimum of 5% of those choosing politicians (when opposing experts) and experts (when opposing citizens) to 9% of those choosing citizens (when opposing politicians). Overall, most answers are clustered in the middle categories (between 50% and 60% of respondents) indicating a

moderate preference as opposed to a clear preference for one of the available decision-makers. In spite of these nuances, the preferences for one decision-maker against the other potential decision-makers allow the identification of preferences for certain models. For example, a respondent is considered as preferring citizens as decision-makers when she favors citizens over both politicians and politically independent experts. To measure the preferences for certain decision-makers, we recoded the respondents – according to the answers they provided – in three categories.

Table 1 about here

First, all respondents who chose 4, 5, or 6 at the question about citizens or elected politicians and those who chose 1, 2, or 3 at the question about elected politicians or experts were considered as preferring representatives as decision-makers. Respondents who made these two choices give consistent priority to politicians both against citizens and experts. Second, all respondents who chose 1, 2, or 3 at the question about citizens or elected politicians and those who chose 4, 5, or 6 at the question about experts or citizens were considered as supporting citizens as decision-makers. Third, respondents who chose 4, 5, or 6 at the question about elected politicians or experts and those who chose 1, 2, or 3 at the question about experts or citizens were considered as endorsing expert decision-making. Respondents who were inconsistent and gave mixed answers (e.g. priority of citizens against politicians but not against experts) were excluded.¹⁰

In our study, preferences for the different decision-makers are mutually exclusive, i.e. a respondent cannot belong to more than one ‘preference category’. A graphical representation of their distribution is depicted in Figure 4 where we also include the percentage of citizens who do not belong to any of the three categories and gave mixed answers.

¹⁰ The four categories presented in Figure 4 have the advantage of differentiating between consistent and inconsistent preferences of respondents. For empirical validation we ran a two-step cluster analysis that identified three homogenous clusters of respondents (in the form of preferences towards one decision-maker or the other) but did not reflect the fourth category of individuals with inconsistent preferences unless clearly specified. This is why we preferred to create separate classes of respondents according to their preferences. We used the Mann-Whitney U test to compare differences between the groups we created (preference for politicians, citizens and experts as decision-makers) for the modes of political participation. Results showed in most of the cases significant differences between these groups.

Figure 4 about here

Civic engagement is a five-point cumulative index of four dummy variables that measure the involvement (coded as 1) of respondents into religious, social, union, and charity organizations. Interest in politics is an ordinal variable measured as the answers provided to the question about how much interest respondents have in politics. The possible answers varied from “not at all” (coded 0) to “very interested” (coded 4). Media consumption is a four-point cumulative index of three dummy variables: watching TV, listening to the radio, and reading newspapers. Each of the variables was coded 0 when the respondent allocated less than one hour per day to media, and 1 when the respondent spent more than one hour per day. Income was coded on a four-point ordinal scale with 1 corresponding to a gross revenue per month of maximum 900 €, 2 when the revenue was between 900 and 1,700 €, 3 to income between 1,700 and 3,200 €, and 4 above 3,200 €. Age has been recoded into four categories with the respondents up to 30 years old in the first group, those between 31 and 45 in the second, those aged 46-60 in the third and Germans above 61 in the last one. Education is a four-point ordinal variable that ranges from basic/primary (1) studies to university degree (4). Availability is operationalized as the provision and the use of direct democratic options, i.e. citizens’ initiatives and popular votes at regional (state) and local level.¹¹ Referring to these numbers, differences are quite obvious: some German states provide more opportunities for citizens to make political decisions than other states. For example, Bavaria stands out with several hundred referendums, while citizens in states like Saarland or Thuringia seldom had the opportunity to cast their vote (see for details Appendix 1).¹²

Analysis and Main Results

The analysis presented in this section is organized in two phases. First, we use correlations to identify bivariate relationships between preferences for political decision-makers and modes

¹¹ An alternative measurement referred to the legislation allowing for use of direct democratic tools but the results did not differ considerably from the use of these tools and thus were not reported in the article.

¹² An alternative measurement is the quorum required for the approval of direct democratic procedures. The empirical results of the two measurements are very similar and we opted for the use of direct democracy tools for reasons of simplicity.

of political participation. The empirical evidence may indicate to what extent there is preliminary support for the three main hypotheses. In a second phase we run an ordinal regression analysis with the modes of political participation as dependent variables to indicate the extent to which preferences for political decision-makers have explanatory power when included in a model with control variables.

Each of the three preferences for certain decision-makers were correlated with modes of political participation, both retrospective and prospective. Partly as a result of the small variation, the correlations are quite weak but empirical evidence goes in the hypothesized directions. The coefficients in Table 2 indicate that people with a preference for representatives as political decision-makers voted more than the others (0.09, statistically significant at 0.01) and were less likely to be involved in modes of political participation beyond elections: -0.05, statistically significant at 0.05 with respect to the participation in referendums and -0.06, statistically significant at 0.01 regarding dialog-oriented consultations. The values of the correlation coefficients are fairly similar between citizens' preferences for decision-makers and prospective political participation.

Respondents preferring citizens as decision-makers are more likely to participate in citizen-oriented modes (referendums, protests, and dialog-oriented consultation) and less likely to participate in voting (-0.05, statistically significant at 0.01). It is important to note that the correlations become stronger for prospective political participation for all the modes of participation beyond elections. For example, the coefficient for referendums increases from 0.03 (no significance) to 0.06 (significant at 0.01) or for consultative procedures where the coefficient is 0.06 for retrospective participation and 0.10 for prospective, both significant at 0.01.

Table 2 about here

The empirical evidence for people preferring experts as decision-makers indicates a mixture of participatory behavior. These respondents have a similar reaction to those favoring representatives as decision-makers in rejecting the participatory forms of participation: -0.03 for referendums and protests and -0.06 for consultations (statistical significant at 0.01). At the same time, their participatory behavior is not inclined towards voting specifically, since

the correlation is almost inexistent (-0.01, not significant). These mixed attitudes can be also observed when referring to prospective participation where they are more likely to participate in voting and referendums, but not in other modes beyond elections (consultation, protest). As expected, there is a nuanced negative attitude towards participatory modes of participation in the prospective question. In particular, these respondents take an interesting turn when asked about previous participation (negative) and willingness to participate in referendums (positive).

Testing of hypotheses

These results provide empirical evidence in favor of the hypothesized relationships. Given the low variation on most modes of participation, the coefficients indicate that there is a consistent relationship between the citizens' preferences for certain decision-makers and modes of participation, both retrospective and prospective. Respondents who favor representatives as decision-makers engage in voting and reject forms in which citizens are involved in political will-formation and decision-making (H1). Respondents who favor citizens as main political decision-makers are oriented to participate in direct, consultative, or protest forms and less in voting (H2). The respondents favoring experts as decision-makers display mixed participatory preferences (H3). These preferences are in retrospective closer to the representative model and in prospective participation somewhat closer to proponents of the participatory model.

Let us now include the preferences for different political decision-makers in a regression model together with the control variables.¹³ The four regression models in Table 3 present the results of the ordered logistic regression for the retrospective forms of participation.¹⁴ The values of Pseudo R² indicate a relatively weak fit of the model to the presented data with best estimation for voting (also with the higher number of

¹³ We ran a collinearity test among the predictor variables and the results indicate no correlation higher than 0.6 between any of them.

¹⁴ For both retrospective and prospective participation we controlled for the availability of direct and deliberative opportunities at state level. The results were not reported in the analysis because there was no effect of this variable, the values of coefficients being always very close to 1. A possible explanation for the lack of explanatory power of the availability argument is provided in the conclusion section.

respondents).¹⁵ The odds-ratios indicate support for H1: respondents with a preference for representatives as decision-makers are 1.34 times more likely to vote than the other respondents and 0.62 and 0.87 times less likely to have participated in referendums, respectively protests and consultations. Two out of the four statistical models provide empirical support for H2: a preference for citizens as political decision-makers has a positive effect (1.26, statistically significant at 0.05) on the participation in protests and consultations, the latter being an obvious form of citizen involvement. These effects are in sharp contrast with the attitudes of respondents, who prefer representatives as decision-makers.¹⁶ There is almost no effect regarding the participation in voting and referendums. The multivariate analysis indicates that the preference for expert decision-maker (H3) has a strong effect only on the presence of referendums with people displaying that attitude being 0.63 times less likely to vote; there is no effect on voting, protests, and previous participation in consultations. Among the control variables, civic engagement, interest in politics and the SES factors have a strong statistically significant effect on all modes of political participation. The availability of tools for citizen involvement – neither at regional nor local level – has no impact on the likelihood to participate in any mode of political participation.

Table 3 about here

The results in Table 4 refer to prospective political participation and show strong empirical support for H1: the preference for politicians as decision-makers enhances the willingness to vote and decreases the desire to engage in participatory activities. Respondents with a preference for citizens as political decision-makers (H2) have a consistent positive attitude towards all modes of political participation. While there is a strong and statistically significant effect at 0.01 on the willingness to participate in referendums, protests and consultations, this preference also has positive effects on the likelihood of prospective

¹⁵ The poor model fit is mainly due to the violation of proportional odds assumption. We have obtained fairly similar results when reconding (and the cut points did not overlap) or when trying a multinomial logit model. For the simplicity of interpretation, we use the ordered logistic regression models in this article.

¹⁶ In interpreting the results of the ordered logistic regression we refer both to the strength and the statistical significance of coefficients. In spite of arguments in favor of interpretations limited strictly to statistical significance, we consider that the strength of effects provides important insights for our arguments.

voting (1.33 significant at 0.05). Citizens with a preference for expert decision-makers (H3) are more inclined to participate in voting and referendums in the future, but undecided about protests (very weak statistical relationship), and less likely to get involved in consultations in the future.

One could argue that the effect of preferences for political decision-makers on prospective participation is stronger since the two might refer to similar attitudes (propensity for participation) unlike the behavior that characterizes retrospective participation. However, the theoretical section of this article illustrated that the normative beliefs and behavioral attitudes are not the same. Citizens can have normative convictions, but their attitudes towards future activity may or may not be in line with these convictions (de Haan & Kuckartz 1996, p.107; Diekmann & Preisendoerfer 1998). In this sense, they are *de facto* two different dimensions, and the empirical findings presented here point in the direction of a positive relationship between them.

Among the control variables civic engagement and interest in politics have a consistent positive effect across all modes of prospective participation, while the SES determinants appear to have somewhat mixed effects. Similarly to the retrospective statistical analysis, availability appears to play no role in shaping prospective political behaviors of German citizens.

Table 4 about here

Conclusions

This article aimed at identifying whether and how preferences of citizens for certain decision-makers influence their retrospective and prospective involvement in politics. Similar to previous results for the Finnish population (Bengtsson & Christensen 2014) we found that also German citizens have different ideas about who should make political decisions. Most citizens prefer a mixture of representative, citizen, and expert decision-making with different prioritizations. And these preferences correlate with their degree and mode of political involvement. We found empirical evidence for most of our hypotheses. There is a clear correlation between citizens' preferences for certain political decision-makers and their (intentions for) political behavior. Respondents favoring representatives as decision-makers

are inclined to take part mainly in electoral participation, while respondents who consider citizens as main decision-makers are more willing to get also involved in non-electoral participatory procedures. Those preferring expert decision-makers show mixed participation (intentions). Looking at our regression analyses, these findings hold also when control variables are added.

In our study we applied two novel exploratory approaches, i.e. the differentiation between retrospective and prospective participation and the impact of the availability of participatory opportunities. These novel approaches are partly promising. Our data shows a crucial difference between retrospective and prospective participation. The correlation between preferences for political decision-makers and political participation was stronger for prospective intentions than for retrospective behavior. Respondents favoring citizens as decision-makers are more inclined to participate in non-electoral modes of participation in the future than they did up to now. These findings can be interpreted in different ways. We might refer to the standard assumption that people show more willingness to do socially accepted activities in the future than they actually do. We might also interpret the finding in the light of future availability of participatory opportunities. From the perspective of citizens, they would participate if opportunities would be available.

The analysis considering our assumptions about the availability of participatory opportunities was challenging. Comparing the availability of direct democratic instruments at the state level with retrospective or prospective participation, no differences can be detected between citizens living in different states. Citizens in all German states show similar participatory preferences as well as similar political activities. However, this might not be the whole story, since data is only provided for rules and usage of direct democratic instruments within German states in general (see Appendix). However, we had no information, whether a referendum or a consultative, dialogue-oriented procedure actually took place in the municipalities the survey respondents live (Roth 2014).¹⁷ Hence, future research might either ask the respondents about consultative procedures conducted in their municipalities, or scholars create a data set providing respective information. It might also be the case that the differences considering rules for and usage of direct democratic opportunities between

¹⁷ This information would be necessary, because German municipalities are conducting more consultative procedures than direct democratic procedures.

the German states are too small. Rules are relatively constricted compared with for example direct democratic opportunities in Swiss cantons or in some US-American states. Cross-national comparison is necessary to reassess our assumption.

Our findings bear theoretical implications that move beyond the investigated single-country study. First, they suggest that normative democratic preferences play a role for intended and actual political participation. Depending on citizens' preferences for political decision-makers, they are more or less willing to get politically involved. Their self-concept of a citizen is related to their concept of democracy. When they prefer citizens as main political decision-makers, they regard themselves as an active part; if they prefer politicians as main political decision-makers, they tend to prefer a less active role for themselves. Second, although availability of participatory procedures did not play a role for our respondents, there are reasons to assume that availability should be taken into account in future research. The third implication refers to citizens' preference for experts as main decision-makers. Citizens favoring experts as political decision-makers do not necessarily want to rely on professional experts. Quite on the contrary, they show an intention to be rather involved in political matters, at least in the future. We might conclude that their preference for expert decision-makers does not necessarily mean they favor professional experts to be the only decision-makers, but they want to participate and to be taken into account.

Our study has shown that research on the linkage between citizens' preferences for certain political decision-makers and accordingly for certain models of democracy and participation are fruitful. It will probably be even more fruitful in the future because new participatory opportunities proliferate around the world providing citizens with more say in political will-formation and decision-making. This development has to be accompanied by empirical research. We need in-depth research to identify the determinants of the relationship between citizens' preferences for different models of democracy and their political participation, i.e. a broader framework with several explanatory factors. While we have shown the existence of a linkage between democratic preferences and (especially prospective) participation, the causal mechanisms require more in-depth investigation. One factor might be the availability of participatory opportunities. Although availability turned out to be less important in our data set, more research in different contexts is necessary on this question. While respective studies are demanding due to scarce data about many

participatory opportunities, research in this field would contribute significantly to our knowledge about participation and democracy.

The relationship between normative preference and political participation might not be unidirectional, but interactive. Research on this question showed that citizens gain more knowledge, improve internal efficiency, acquire political skills and become 'better citizens' via participation (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Quintelier & van Deth 2014). Interrelations and interactions between preferences for certain political decision-makers and modes of participation have not been scrutinized up to now. Future research will have to examine also this question. Political science just began to tackle all relevant and crucial questions in this field.

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Figure 1: The analytical framework: Citizens' preferences and political participation

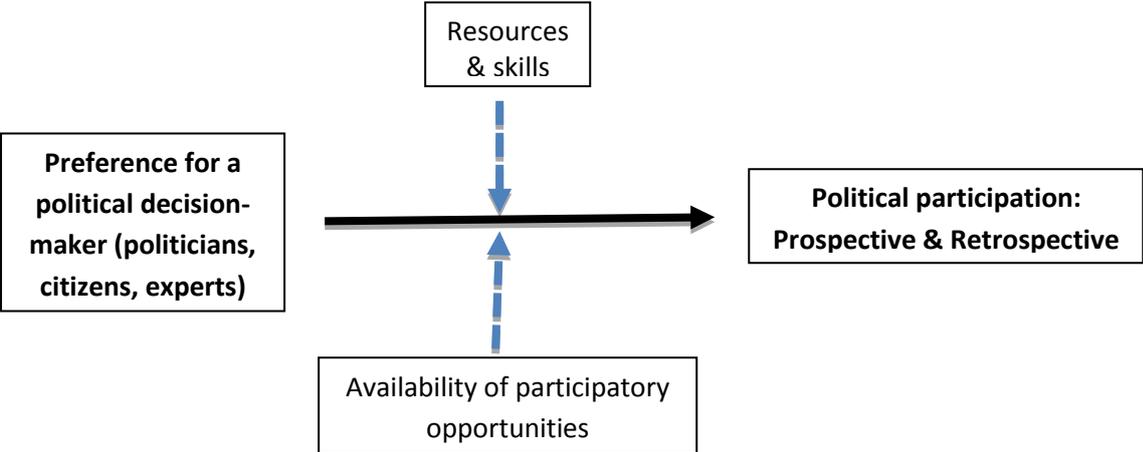
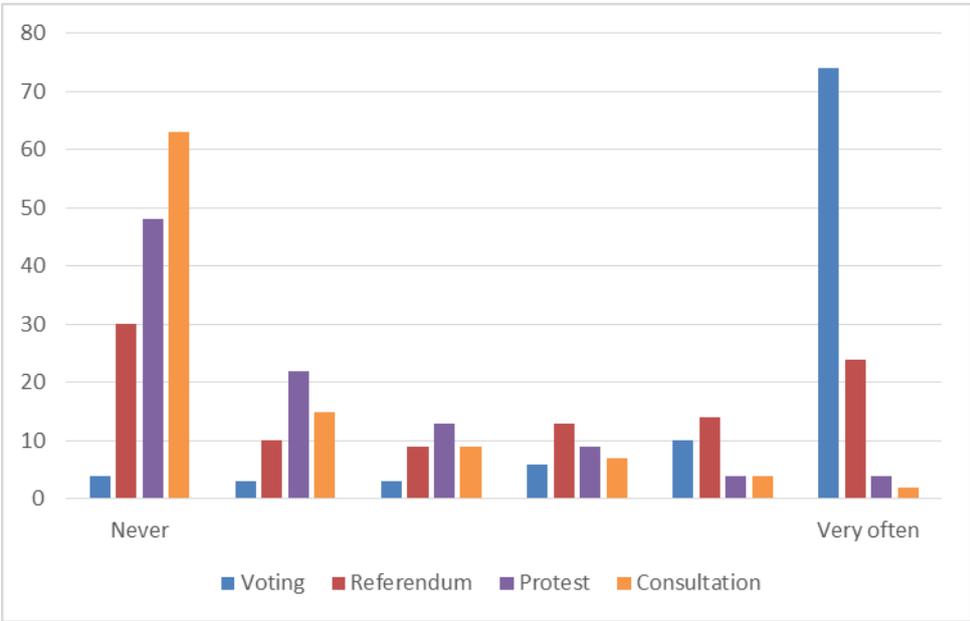
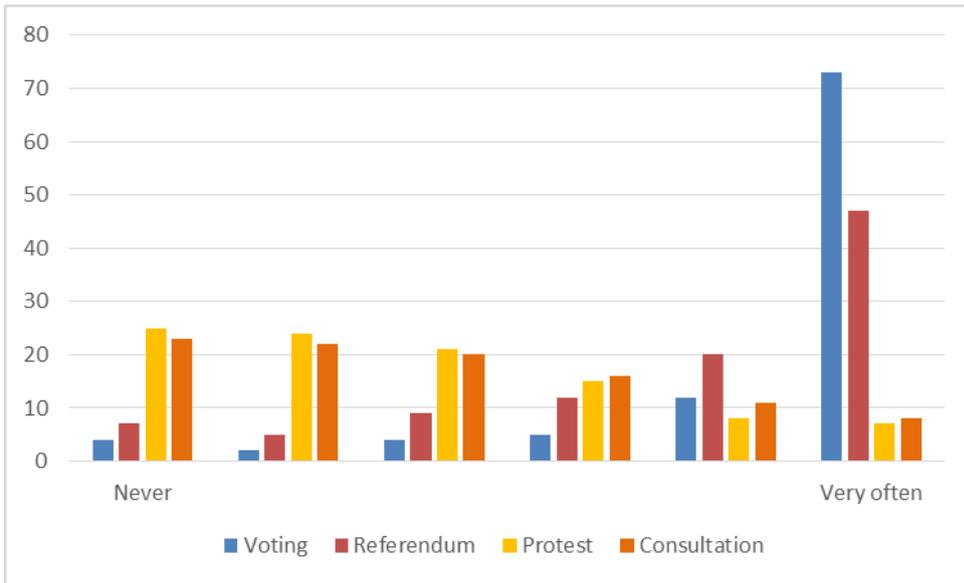


Figure 2: The Modes of Retrospective Political Participation



Note: N differs across modes of participation between 3,286 and 3,897.

Figure 3: The Modes of Prospective Political Participation



Note: N differs across modes of participation between 3,287 and 3,888.

Figure 4: Preferences for political decision makers among respondents

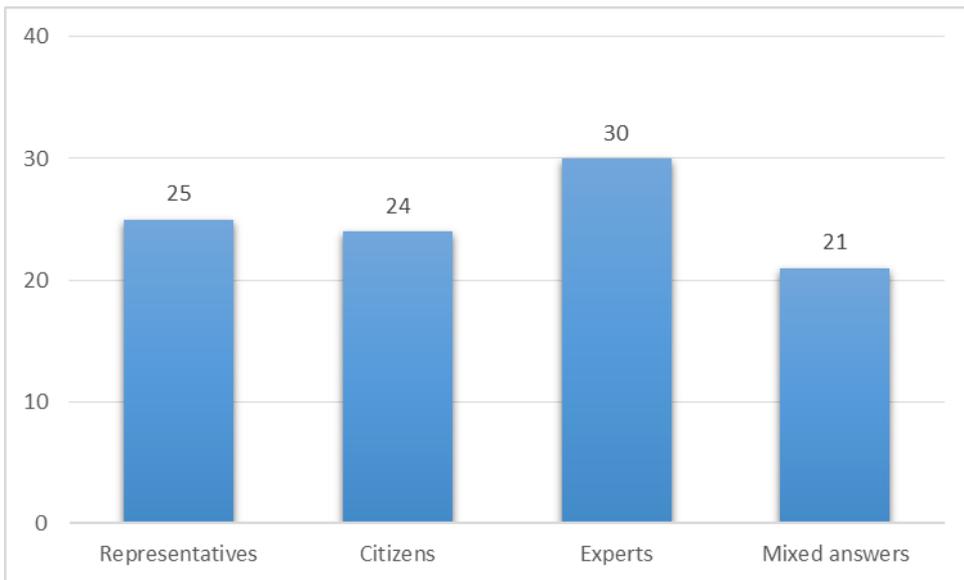


Table 1: The distribution of respondents according to their preferred decision maker (%)

| Citizens vs. Representatives | | Representatives vs. Experts | | Experts vs. Citizens | |
|------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|
| Citizens | 9 | Politicians | 5 | Experts | 5 |
| | 14 | | 12 | | 17 |
| | 25 | | 28 | | 34 |
| | 28 | | 28 | | 26 |
| | 18 | | 20 | | 11 |
| Politicians | 6 | Experts | 7 | Citizens | 7 |
| N | 3,811 | | 3,758 | | 3,722 |

Table 2: Correlations between preferences for political decision-maker and political participation

| | Representatives | Citizens | Experts |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------|---------|
| Retrospective | | | |
| Voting | 0.09** | -0.05** | -0.01 |
| Referendum | -0.05* | 0.03 | -0.03 |
| Protests | -0.01 | 0.06** | -0.02 |
| Consultation | -0.06** | 0.06** | -0.06** |
| Prospective | | | |
| Voting | 0.08** | -0.04** | 0.06** |
| Referendum | -0.04* | 0.06** | 0.05** |
| Protests | -0.02 | 0.07** | 0.01 |
| Consultation | -0.07** | 0.10** | -0.03 |

Notes: The number of respondents for correlations is between 3,014 and 3,604.

Presented coefficients are non-parametric (Spearman).

** Significant at $p < 0.01$, * Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 3: Ordered Logistic Regression for retrospective political participation

| | Voting | Referendum | Protests | Consultation |
|--------------------------------|--------|------------|----------|--------------|
| Preference for representatives | 1.34* | 0.62** | 0.87 | 0.87 |
| | (0.19) | (0.07) | (0.09) | (0.10) |
| Preference for citizens | 1.08 | 0.96 | 1.26* | 1.26* |
| | (0.15) | (0.10) | (0.14) | (0.14) |
| Preference for experts | 1.02 | 0.63** | 0.98 | 0.98 |
| | (0.13) | (0.07) | (0.11) | (0.11) |
| Civic engagement | 1.40** | 1.21** | 1.72** | 1.72** |
| | (0.11) | (0.06) | (0.09) | (0.09) |
| Interest in politics | 2.23** | 1.35** | 1.55** | 1.55** |
| | (0.14) | (0.06) | (0.07) | (0.07) |
| Media consumption | 1.04 | 1.03 | 0.92** | 0.92** |
| | (0.04) | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.03) |
| Income | 1.40** | 1.08* | 1.13** | 1.13** |
| | (0.07) | (0.04) | (0.04) | (0.04) |
| Age | 2.11** | 1.34** | 1.10* | 1.11* |
| | (0.12) | (0.06) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| Education | 1.79** | 1.04 | 1.36** | 1.36** |
| | (0.12) | (0.05) | (0.08) | (0.08) |
| Availability regional level | 0.99 | 1.04** | 1.01 | 1.01 |
| | (0.01) | (0.05) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Availability local level | 1.01 | 0.99 | 0.99** | 0.99 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| N | 2,909 | 2,563 | 2,744 | 2,744 |
| LR Chi ² | 780.06 | 325.65 | 446.25 | 446.25 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.14 | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.06 |

Note: Coefficients are odds-ratios (standard errors in brackets)

** Significant at $p < 0.01$, * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4: Ordered Logistic Regression for prospective political participation

| | Voting | Referendum | Protests | Consultations |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Preference for representatives | 1.71** (0.23) | 0.87 (0.09) | 0.90 (0.09) | 0.71** (0.08) |
| Preference for citizens | 1.33* (0.17) | 1.49** (0.16) | 1.33** (0.14) | 1.35** (0.15) |
| Preference for experts | 1.59** (0.20) | 1.22** (0.13) | 1.05 (0.11) | 0.87 (0.09) |
| Civic engagement | 1.30** (0.09) | 1.14* (0.06) | 1.56** (0.08) | 1.45** (0.08) |
| Interest in politics | 1.96** (0.11) | 1.70** (0.08) | 1.52** (0.07) | 1.63** (0.07) |
| Media consumption | 0.98 (0.04) | 0.99 (0.03) | 0.94* (0.03) | 0.94 (0.03) |
| Income | 1.23** (0.06) | 1.07 (0.04) | 1.05 (0.04) | 1.02 (0.04) |
| Age | 1.44** (0.08) | 1.13** (0.05) | 0.95 (0.04) | 1.01 (0.04) |
| Education | 1.76** (0.11) | 1.46** (0.09) | 1.39** (0.07) | 1.03 (0.05) |
| Availability regional level | 0.99 (0.01) | 1.01 (0.01) | 1.01* (0.01) | 0.99 (0.01) |
| Availability local level | 1.01 (0.01) | 1.01 (0.01) | 0.99** (0.01) | 1.01 (0.01) |
| N | 2,908 | 2,815 | 2,765 | 2,466 |
| LR Chi ² | 514.14 | 340.32 | 368.12 | 275.80 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.09 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 |

Notes: Coefficients are odds-ratios (standard errors in brackets)

** Significant at $p < 0.01$, * Significant at $p < 0.05$

APPENDIX 1: Direct democratic instruments in Germany at state and local levels (2013-2014)

| | Number of citizens' initiatives, state, N | Number of popular votes, state, N | Number of Local Citizen Initiatives, N | Number of local popular votes, N |
|-------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Baden-Württemberg | 0 | 2 | 552 | 332 |
| Bavaria | 20 | 21 | 2,075 | 1,517 |
| Berlin | 9 | 9 | 36 | 13 |
| Brandenburg | 11 | 3 | 134 | 160 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|----|-----|-----|
| Bremen | 4 | 3 | 6 | 1 |
| Hamburg | 16 | 7 | 100 | 20 |
| Hesse | 1 | 11 | 388 | 137 |
| Mecklenburg West. Pomerania | 4 | 1 | 89 | 47 |
| Lower Saxony | 3 | 0 | 280 | 86 |
| North Rhine Westphalia | 2 | 1 | 667 | 194 |
| Rhineland-Palatinate | 1 | 2 | 166 | 80 |
| Saarland | 1 | 0 | 15 | 0 |
| Saxony | 4 | 1 | 211 | 159 |
| Saxony Anhalt | 3 | 1 | 92 | 190 |
| Schleswig-Holstein | 5 | 2 | 388 | 201 |
| Thuringia | 5 | 1 | 155 | 40 |

Source: Schiller 2014;

http://www.mehr-demokratie.de/volksentscheide_in_deutschland.html, accessed June 2015

<http://www.mehr-demokratie.de/volksbegehren-deutschland00.html>, accessed June 2015