



# LEUPHANA

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A Bachelor's Thesis with the Title:

### **Access to Power and Support for Direct Democracy – Evidence from Europe**

By

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## **Abstract**

Direct Democracy is en vogue in Europe: Its instruments are increasingly employed (Altman 2011), and the public is approving across the board (Leininger 2015). But who exactly endorses participatory procedures, and for what reasons? Research predominantly assumes interest in mechanisms such as referendums or initiatives to reflect normative beliefs on how democracy should be practiced (Werner 2020). However, scholars increasingly point to evidence that individuals' strategic 'calculations' play a role in the formation of their direct-democratic approval (Landwehr & Harms 2020). This paper adds to the canon and argues that voters self-interestedly align their procedural preferences based on their perception of how likely politics will be responsive to them. In electoral regimes, citizen influence is mediated by parties, whose integration within the political arena determines how much 'access to power' their voters hold. Those who support less influential parties are incentivized to endorse alternative democratic mechanisms such as referendums. Vice versa, those who have more access to power are expected to approve of the status quo and to be more critical of participatory politics. A statistical analysis across 20 European democracies based on ESS data details conditional support for my argument. Smaller variations in the voters' access to power do not lead them towards adjusted referendum support. However, those farthest away from being influential in the policymaking process differ in their preferences, indicating they might act strategically to a certain extent. These findings put the results of earlier studies into a new perspective.

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# 1 Introduction

The citizens' right to political participation lies at the center of democracy (Welzel 2019: 22). However, democracy's general conception does not 'spell out' how exactly the participatory privilege is ought to be practiced (Müller-Rommel & Geißel 2020). In consequence, over the long history of political evolution, different answers emerged for the question of how a democracy should institutionalize 'people-power', and some of these notions were made real-world systems with corresponding procedures (Coppedge et al. 2011; Gagnon 2018; Gabriel 2020). Yet, out of all different forms of democratic governance, one crystallized as the temporary winner: modern democracies are representative systems (Dalton et al. 2001; Welzel 2019: 23). The general characteristic of these polities is that "entitled citizens elect trustees or delegates who then assemble to decide on issues for their voters [...]" (Welzel 2019: 23).

Modern democracy and its representative procedures have a remarkable success story to tell (Welzel 2014; Diamond 2015) – a story so exceptional, that only 35 years ago, political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1989: 4) proclaimed the "end of history". The western model of democracy had prevailed over all other forms of government, he claimed. However, with little delay, early signs of a 'crisis of democracy' began to surface (Hobson 2008), and today, it is apparent that he was mistaken.

Democracy does not only struggle on the geopolitical stage with the major antidemocratic forces of China and Russia (Pei 2021; Zavadskaya 2023) but must increasingly fight reactionary advances from within. Also the "mature" (Alexander & Welzel 2017: 1) democracies are pressured by the recent electoral victories of antidemocratic parties; some even experienced 'democratic backsliding' in consequence of such movements taking executive positions and dismantling core institutions (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018; Csaky 2021; Internation IDEA 2023).

Meanwhile, scholars point out that the crisis goes deeper, and that these phenomena are only expressions of less palpable grassroot-level developments: growing cynicism with and distrust in democratic institutions and representatives, the expanding rejection of party politics, and electoral disengagement (Hobson 2008; Alonso et al. 2011; Katznelson 2015; Jones & Matthijs 2017; Thomassen & van Ham 2017; Castells 2018; Claassen 2020; Plescia & Eberl 2021; Landwehr et al. 2022; Vercesi 2022; Mair 2023; Singh & Mayne 2023). Some researchers even go as far as to claim that a large-scale erosion of public beliefs is underway – in other words, an attitudinal "democratic deconsolidation" (Foa & Mounk 2016: 5) that leaves citizens increasingly endorsing of authoritarian government and unfavorable towards the general idea of democratic procedures (Foa & Mounk 2016, 2017, 2019; Foa et al. 2022).

While no one doubts the recent developments are to be taken seriously, many scholars are less pessimistic about democracy's prospect as "the only game in town" (Linz & Stepan 1996: 14), often arguing that evidence is not as one-sided (Voeten 2016; Norris 2017; Merkel & Kneip 2018; Zilinsky 2019; Müller-Rommel & Geißel 2020; Welzel 2021; Wuttke et al. 2022; van der Meer & van Erkel 2023). In fact, optimism might also be justified as research reports that discontent with democracy must not reflect a general disapproval of democracy's core values. Quite the contrary, people are often critical of representative practices, but instead of opposing democracy per se, they frequently endorse alternative democratic models (Zaslove & Meijers 2023). From this more nuanced viewpoint, the 'crisis of democracy' might rather be a "crisis of representative democracy" (Vercesi 2022: 85).

These considerations emphasize the importance of thinking about other approaches to democratic governance. And indeed, the challenges western democracy faces have sparked academic interest in so-called 'democratic innovations' (Smith 2010; Della Porta & Felicetti 2022). Foremost, participatory democracy, i.e., direct democracy has received a great amount of scholarly attention (Geißel & Newton 2011; Müller-Rommel & Geißel 2020). Direct democracy differs from representative democracy as it allows public participation and decision-making without the intermediary role of elected officials and parties. In referendums, initiatives, councils and other procedures, citizens can directly express their preferences and decide on policy issues, making this democratic model more immediate and participatory (Dalton et al. 2001; Coppedge et al. 2011; Gabriel 2020).

Direct-democratic practices are usually dated back to ancient Athens (Coppedge et al. 2011; Welzel 2019: 23). Today, no polity is constituted as a matching system, and the use of participatory instruments is infrequent in relation to representative processes (Leininger 2015). Yet, some nations have participatory practices institutionalized on their national, federal and local levels (Lindner 2007; Geißel 2019), and in sum, the employment of such mechanisms has expanded (Altman 2011: 70; Krämling et al. 2023).

While the idea of participatory democracy is popular among citizens worldwide (Donovan & Karp 2006; Leininger 2015), the surrounding debate is controversial (Schuck & Vreese 2015; Gabriel 2020). Part of the recent scholarly interest is due to the pivotal question of whether its procedures may be a potent antidote against democracy's previously mentioned struggles (Smith 2010; Geißel & Newton 2011; Grönlund et al. 2014; Leininger 2015; Geißel 2019; Woo & Kübler 2020; Della Porta & Felicetti 2022; Krämling et al. 2023). While from a theoretical standpoint there are convincing arguments, e.g., in relation to democratic legitimacy and

responsiveness, empirical evidence is mixed (Marien & Kern 2018). Some scholars' findings allow positive conclusions (Bowler & Donovan 2002; Stadelmann-Steffen & Vatter 2012; Leemann & Stadelmann-Steffen 2022); others' results suggest skepticism (Bauer & Fatke 2014). Some also point out that it is often the voters of antiliberal or antidemocratic parties that cheer for direct democracy (Jacobs et al. 2018; Koch et al. 2023; Wegscheider et al. 2023; Zaslove & Meijers 2023). That raises the question whether they are really interested in more participation or rather in the 'tyranny of the (perceived) silent majority'. Lastly, the debate persists about if the use of direct-democratic instruments can continually create satisfying results in a complex globalized world (Kirchgässner 2015; Bulmer 2017; Gabriel 2020).

The controversy around the merits and pitfalls of direct democracy and its relation to democracy's puzzling condition, highlights the need for further research. To gain deepened insight into how the use of more participatory mechanisms relates to the future prospect of representative democracy, it is crucial to understand which citizens support direct democracy and for what reasons? In the last two decades, a substantial amount of research has been conducted on the former. As a result, we have a reasonable comprehension of who welcomes participatory institutions and who rejects them (Dalton et al. 2001; Donovan & Karp 2006; Bowler et al. 2007; Bengtsson & Mattila 2009; Gabriel 2013; Bowler et al. 2017; Mohrenberg et al. 2021). However, the motivations behind such preferences are less clear.<sup>1</sup>

Research on the matter often assumes those preferences to be expressions of stable normative attitudes concerning how democracy should (not) be practiced (Werner 2020). Recently, however, scholars have increasingly pointed to evidence that citizens' procedural preferences, among them direct-democratic ones, are also partly driven by short-term self-interest, *inter alia*, expressing itself in their 'fluidity' and context specificity (see, e.g., Biggers 2019; Arnesen et al. 2021). Yet, questions remain. Foremost, the research lacks a sophisticated understanding of which factors exactly shape self-interested preference formations and how they relate to political power in electoral democracy. Moreover, the evidence on strategic adjustments of direct-democratic support mainly relies on observations from single countries, and uncertainty persists on whether such effects can be observed across nations.

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond citizen preferences concerning direct democracy, it is also important to evaluate why institutions such as parties endorse participatory instruments. For such projects, see Bawn (1993), Bowler et al. (2002, 2006), Gherghina and Pilet (2021), and Engler et al. (forthcoming).

To contribute to the literature on direct-democratic approval, this paper develops and tests an argument that highlights the importance of self-interested preference formations. I reason that voters align their endorsement of participatory instruments with their perception of how likely the policy process will be responsive to them. This view reflects that political procedures are critical in directing ‘who gets his way’ because they shape who holds what power. In representative systems, where direct citizen involvement is not intended or at least very limited, parties and their functionaries constitute intermediaries that decide on the people’s behalf. How influential a party is, hence, determines how much ‘access to power’ the party supporter holds. Those whose party is more powerful are expected to back representative practices, as these procedures make it probable that political outputs are in line with their self-interest. Correspondingly, they will have a lower inclination to endorse participatory democracy. Vice versa, those who have less access to power are hypothesized to be systematically more supportive of the expanded use of direct-democratic mechanisms.

To empirically test the argument and answer this study’s guiding research question, ‘*In how far does variation in the citizens’ access to power explain their preferences concerning the practice of direct democracy?*’, a framework of party power is introduced. It seeks to capture the institutions’ ‘power integration’ within the political arena and thus to measure the access to power of their supporters. The framework is operationalized with the help of the latest European Social Survey update, and the resulting variables are employed as predictors for voters’ referendum support in a regression analysis encompassing 20 European countries.

The results of my analysis indicate qualified support for my argument. Voters do not adjust their preferences in response to lesser variations in their access to power. However, those who are farthest away from being influential in politics are more inclined than others to approve of holding referendums. These observations help to view earlier findings from a new perspective, and while they indicate that strategic preference adjustments exist, they equally oppose the view that self-interest is the central driving force behind direct-democratic support.

The paper is structured in the following way: The next chapter gives an overview of the relevant literature in relation to the research question and presents the research gap. Chapter three lays out the theoretical framework of the study. That includes the elaboration of the main argument, the specification of the core concepts, and the deduction of the hypothesis. Chapter four outlines the data and methods employed in the analysis as well as the limitations of the study. Chapter five reports the empirical results, while chapter six reflects upon them and proposes useful follow-up research. The last chapter details concluding remarks.

## 2 Literature

Who supports the idea of direct democracy, its implementation, and for what reasons? As with other political preference research, e.g., studies of populism (Berman 2021), the puzzle of direct-democratic support can be examined from different perspectives: Top-down approaches argue that the focal point of attention should lie on political structures. Institutions, foremost parties, are expected to shape the public approval of direct democracy. While studies have found such explanations to play a role in mass preference alignments, also very specifically regarding participatory democracy (Mohrenberg et al. 2021; Riambau et al. 2021; Fölsch et al. 2024), this study relies on a bottom-up perspective. The following literature review mainly focuses on the canon that highlights the importance of the individual agency in the formation of preferences.

### 2.1 Emancipation and Dissatisfaction

In explaining direct democracy's surge in popularity and the growing rejection of representative forms of decision-making among citizens, political science literature has predominately focused on two competing ideas: emancipation and dissatisfaction (Dalton et al. 2001).

The "New Politics explanation" (Dalton et al. 2001: 145) has its roots in the works of Ronald Inglehart, who, in a set of publications, developed the argument that the western societies undergo a process of cultural evolution (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1999). Advances in, among others, economy, education and public services, are said to increase the cognitive skills and material resources of the public, driving fundamental changes in societal values. As people need to worry less about their simple physical needs and have more access to education, an expansion of postmaterialist values of self-expression and emancipation manifests itself. Even though this process moves at a "glacial pace" (Welzel et al. 2022: 158), it gradually increases antihierarchical sentiments and the individual's feeling of competency to make political decisions (Dalton et al. 2001). As a consequence of this "cognitive mobilization" (Dalton 1984: 264) the demand for citizen participation intensifies, and a mismatch between participatory demand and option emerges: The limited possibilities for citizen involvement in our representative systems are not sufficient to satisfy the new societal class, which Norris (1999) terms "critical citizens", while Dalton & Welzel (2014) speak of "assertive citizens".

The New Politics thesis implies that it is primarily the younger, economically better off, the politically engaged and interested, as well as the more highly educated parts of society that hold a deep normative interest in more participatory options (Donovan & Karp 2006). That differs from the second thesis, which Dalton et al. (2001: 148) term the "political dissatisfaction explanation". It assumes that it is rather the citizens at "the periphery of politics" (Schuck &

Vreese 2015: 155), those who are less educated, politically disengaged, economically worse off, and those who hold extreme ideological positions, who see virtue in participation. The thesis relies on the assessment that parts of society perceive contemporary democracy, its officials and institutions, to be unresponsive to their will (Berman 2021). The consequential frustration with the political reality – at the extremes, maybe even perceived disenfranchisement – is said to foster alienation from representative practices (Bowler et al. 2007). As a result, these citizens are expected to develop deep normative attitudes in favor of processes that allow them to bypass the ‘unresponsive elites’, or they seek out any other decision-making methods, one of which they find in direct democracy (Dalton et al. 2001).

Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (2002) introduce a third explanatory approach. In their studies on the process preferences of the US public, they find that, although direct democracy appears to be en vogue, its popularity is low among citizens. Instead, Americans want what Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (2002: 2) term “stealth democracy”. Stealth democratic attitudes reflect the interest for the system not to become more participatory but more technocratic and effective. The observed popularity of direct democracy does not indicate a belief in participatory means of government. Instead, dissatisfied citizens see it as a way to control representatives.<sup>2</sup>

The empirical research has produced mixed results on the competing explanatory attempts. Dalton et al. (2001) find no support for cognitive mobilization in Germany, as well as in 15 other European countries. Instead, they report that with more political interest as well as higher education, direct-democratic preferences decline, whereas discontent with parties or the functioning of democracy, as well as lower levels of political trust, show to be strong predictors of support for more participatory modes of decision-making. They argue that these findings also express themselves as partisanship effects: Not the support of the German Green Party but voting for minor and radical parties relates to stronger levels of direct-democratic preferences. Conversely, Donovan & Karp (2006) find more indications that politically competent and younger people favor participatory democracy, while political discontent is said to play a lesser role. However, they also outline that non-voters are more supportive of direct democracy, which underlines the dissatisfaction explanation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The stealth democracy explanation rests upon a similar argument than the dissatisfaction thesis. However, it differs in the assessment of which political processes people actually want (Bowler et al. 2007).

<sup>3</sup> A similar finding is presented by Gabriel (2013). He reports that those without party preferences are substantially more supportive of direct-democratic mechanisms.

Bowler et al. (2007) evaluate emancipation as well as dissatisfaction predictors across 16 nations and report evidence for the explanatory value of both approaches. Nonetheless, politically interested, trusting and satisfied citizens were more strongly linked to direct-democratic support. Schuck & Vreese (2015) assess referendum support among citizens in 21 European countries. They introduce two new measures, civic duty and political cynicism, and similarly find evidence for both explanatory approaches. Political cynicism, however, appears to be the more suitable explanation. Additionally, they report extreme ideologies as strong positive predictors of participatory preferences.

In a study of Finland's voters, Bengtsson & Mattila (2009) detail evidence for the role of political disappointment: perceived unresponsiveness presents itself as a strong predictor of the wish for process reform. Whether that change goes into the direction of stealth or direct democracy appears to be of secondary interest. The authors, however, advise against overinterpreting their results because citizen preferences seem to be logically inconsistent. Often, people will simultaneously be in favor of more technocracy as well as direct democracy. Webb (2013) mirrors their findings for the UK and tries to explain the seeming contradiction of parallel support for less and more participation. He argues that the wish for stealth democracy and direct democracy are not mutually exclusive but mediated by the anti-elitism element of populist attitudes. It is more active forms of participation that stealth Democrats shy away from, while in referendums they see an effective way to control the supposedly unresponsive elites. Beyond that, he finds that in real cases of referendums, neither stealth democrats nor dissatisfied citizens are more inclined to participate, supporting the idea that mere frustration with the reality of representative politics and not emancipation explains direct-democratic support. Mohrenberg et al. (2021) further investigate the relationship between populist and stealth democratic attitudes and outline that both views incorporate an anti-establishment notion that grounds itself in distrust of and discontent with political elites. However, while populists also share a notion of "the pure people" and believe in a "volonté générale" (Mudde 2004: 543) they understand taking effect in direct-democratic decision-making, stealth democrats appear to not trust 'the people' to make wise political decisions. For them, participatory mechanisms are merely a useful tool of control representatives.

Recent research on populist and radical voting further verifies the dissatisfaction thesis. Voters of the respective parties are found to hold more significant preferences in favor of participatory democracy. Their voting decisions can be explained by perceived unresponsiveness, political discontent, low income and other predictors in line with the idea of marginalized citizens (Rooduijn 2018; Rojon & Rijken 2020; Berman 2021; Droste 2021; Ferrari 2021).

All three theoretical approaches presented in this chapter highlight the role of electoral and party politics in what we recognize as democracy's crisis. While the dissatisfaction as well as the stealth democracy thesis focus on the perceived unresponsiveness of the representative system, the new politics explanation does not identify the original source of direct-democratic preferences in representative politics, but still indicates an emerging mismatch between newfound participatory demand and involvement options. Werner (2020) finds the explanatory attempts to share another common ground. Often implicitly, they understand citizen preferences to reflect normative beliefs of how democracy is (not) ought to be practiced, e.g., as an expression of views concerning procedural justice.<sup>4</sup> In other words, support and rejection of direct democracy are understood as ideological predispositions based on attitudes deeply integrated in the individual's value system. Thus, they are not prone to short-term fluctuation in light of new information, but stable over time (Werner 2020).

## 2.2 The Winner-Loser Gap

Although the explanations around emancipation and dissatisfaction make up the bulk of the debate around direct-democratic approval (Landwehr & Harms 2020), other views on the matter exist. These alternate perspectives ask the question of whether such preferences truly reflect stable normative beliefs, or if they are less ideologically determined and more fluid.<sup>5</sup>

The literature on the winner-loser gap constitutes the main alternative perspective on the subject. It reflects that the political procedures, foremost elections, allocate the power to influence the policymaking process. That always leaves (non)-beneficiaries: Some gain or keep political power to influence decision-making; others do not gain or lose political influence. Consequently, this literature examines in how far and in what ways these experiences of winning and losing in electoral politics affect people's views, independently of their ideological predispositions. The expectation is that winning makes citizens more favorable towards the way democracy is practiced, explaining their support for existing procedures. Vice versa, losers are more open to institutional reform, e.g., the introduction of participatory elements (Wenzel et al.

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<sup>4</sup> Either citizens see inherent virtue in direct-democratic procedures, or they perceive these values to be absent in representative institutional processes, which leads them to seek alternatives. Both reflects normative beliefs regarding the 'right or wrong way' to practice democracy.

<sup>5</sup> Part of that research simultaneously falls under the canon on "process preferences" (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001: 145). Instead of focusing on direct democracy, it asks the broader question: How do preferences regarding political procedures generally come to be, and how do they develop over time (Wojcieszak 2014; Riambau et al. 2021; Fernández-Martínez et al. 2022)?

2000; Biggers 2019). As the winner-loser status, or the subjective evaluation of it, might change abruptly, the approach expects procedural preferences “to be fluid and responsive to electoral politics, rather than constant and stable” (Smith et al. 2010: 518).<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the winner-loser literature continuously points to evidence for its proposed effects on citizen attitudes and perceptions. On that note, Banducci & Karp (2003) find that electoral outcomes correlate with variation in system support: Voters of government parties are systematically more satisfied than those of opposition parties. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2005) observe electoral losers to be less satisfied with democracy and to evaluate it as less fair and responsive than electoral winners. However, these effects vary across contexts. In majoritarian democracies such as the US, losers report less satisfaction than losers in proportional systems. Beyond that, supporters of the losing party that had last been in government are less dissatisfied than supporters of other losing parties. The authors (2005: 160) attribute this effect to voters of the latter parties perceiving themselves as “long-term losers”. Additionally, they conclude that electoral losers, especially those that expect to lose in future elections, appear to be stronger advocates of institutional reform.

Wenzel et al. (2000) report that ‘Labour Party’ voters, who were long-term losers at that time, as well as minor party supporters were more strongly in favor of electoral reform in the UK. Considering the relative weight of different factors, they do, however, observe that ideology, measured as self-placement in the left-right spectrum, also plays a significant role. Smith et al. (2010) show that losing in the electoral sphere, as well as feeling to be on the losing side of salient issues, promote short-term shifts in referendum support in the US. Repeated losers are most likely to format their process preferences. Fougere et al. (2010) report that US voters of the incumbency party perceive redistricting processes in their states to be fair, while those of the opposition party are more critical. Tolbert et al. (2009) observe a similar phenomenon: American representational losers are systematically more likely to vote for nonpartisan district reform on the federal and local level. Biggers & Ross (2024) find that voters of opposition parties are more supportive of direct democracy. Donovan et al. (2023) refrain from using ‘objective’ criteria for winning and losing, such as electoral outcomes, but measure subjective feelings. Nonetheless, the general effect is replicated as self-perceived losers in the US appear

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<sup>6</sup> The winner-loser explanation argues similar to the dissatisfaction thesis, when it states that the more one loses or feels as a loser, the more support for institutional change can be expected. However, it differs as it assumes short-term elements in process preference formations that hold across individual ideological predispositions. Conversely, the dissatisfaction thesis expects direct-democratic support to be a stable normative attitude towards democracy.

more likely to support reforms of how elections are conducted. Bowler & Donovan (2007) take a different approach. They do not rely on survey data but run a random assignment experiment, in which they report that electoral winners are more risk-averse, while losers, especially repeated losers, display risk-seeking behavior. Even when a procedural reform proposal is framed as leading to unfavorable outcomes, the latter are more inclined to support it.

Most of the presented studies on the winner-loser gap empirically evaluate its validity for the US – and some for the UK. However, these countries constitute exceptional cases because they are majoritarian ‘First-Past-The-Post’ systems. Supporters of losing parties are necessarily not formally represented at all in those countries, which makes losing a profoundly serious experience. In consensus democracies, where coalition governments are common, losing might be perceived as less drastic (Banducci & Karp 2003; Anderson et al. 2005). However, recent studies have focused on other countries and found similar effects there.

Schnaudt (2023) reports evidence for a winner-loser gap in relation to electoral integrity beliefs in Germany. Moehler (2009) observes similar phenomena in twelve African countries, where electoral losers are less satisfied and trusting in institutions but likewise more likely to denounce flawed elections and defend the institutions’ integrity. Similar results are revealed for 26 European countries by Mazepus & Toshkov (2022). They find that electoral losers are much more supportive of checks and balances and less likely to support reforms that potentially infringe the judiciary. Pilet et al. (2023) details that opposition party supporters, across 15 European countries, are systematically more favorable of Deliberative-Mini-Publics. Brummel (2020) outlines that the referendum support of winners does not increase after their win, however, the support of losers decreases after their loss. Martini & Quaranta (2019) evaluate for 30 European democracies why the winner-loser gap is larger in some of them than in others. They find that while the gap is smaller in consensus systems, that cannot explain variation over time. Instead, political output is decisive.

### **2.3 Self-Interest and Strategy**

The evidence in favor of the winner-loser gap indicates that there should be at least one other source for the approval of direct democracy and institutional reform, apart from normative beliefs. With that in mind, the literature often argues that the causal mechanism at play is strategy (Tolbert et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2010; Bowler & Donovan 2013: 13; Gabriel 2013; Riambau et al. 2021).

Strategy is understood as (partisan) self-interested considerations and an according alignment of procedural preferences, based on the processing of political information. Such preference

formations can be regarded as the result of a rational “output-oriented” (Landwehr & Harms 2020: 876) thought process, in which the citizen evaluates whether the use of a political instrument<sup>7</sup> is helpful or detrimental in achieving his interest. The strategic citizen does not hinge his preferences regarding different democratic procedures on “input-oriented” (ibid.: 876) beliefs, i.e., “intrinsic” (ibid.: 875) values that he attributes to said procedures but is interested primarily in the results of the political process.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, he will reformat his preferences fluidly if he finds a process has changed its instrumental value for attaining his interests. Biggers (2019: 1027) describes the strategic winner-loser mechanism as follows:

“Those holding political power, or electoral winners, have a strong incentive to either maintain the status quo (under which they claimed electoral success) or to craft reforms that help entrench and perpetuate their hold on office. In contrast, those currently out of government (electoral losers) favor policies likely to alter the current system in a manner that improves their electoral prospects.”

Specifically, in relation to direct-democratic preference formation, the strategic mechanism is described incisively by Gabriel (2013). He details that across ideological positions, there is an effect of (non-)partisanship on referendum support in Germany. Those supporting opposition and minority parties, as well as those without party preference, are found to be much more inclined to be in favor of direct democracy. Gabriel attributes that phenomenon to the power calculations of said citizens. Those supportive of incumbent parties see direct democracy as a danger to their party’s power, while those on the other side see it as an instrument to enforce policies that have no chance in the parliamentary arena.

However, it remains unclear whether such strategic considerations really are at play in shaping citizen support for institutional change and direct democracy. Biggers (2019) argues that most studies on winner-loser effects do not allow that conclusion because of shortcomings in their study design. Often, what is reflected are simply the strong effects of partisanship. In turn, voters are revealed to be in line with what one would expect to be their strategic preference, without ever testing whether citizens really take part in a preceding process of ‘calculation’.

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<sup>7</sup> The literature uses the terms ‘strategic’ and ‘instrumental’ interchangeably. This study does so too, as both expressions convey the idea that direct-democratic procedures are supported if they are perceived as helpful for the advancement of one’s interest and rejected if found to be detrimental.

<sup>8</sup> The importance of differentiating between processes as such and its outputs or outcomes was originally brought up by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001).

The author states that there are at least two alternative causal mechanisms that may explain the observable congruence between self-interest and process preferences, without strategy being the operational mechanism: elite cues and affectivity.

The elite cue explanation describes that parties provide their supporters with pointers to which policies or processes they should approve. Citizens may use those as heuristics to decide upon their preferences. As parties may base their own procedural preferences, and therefore also the leads they provide, on their own strategic interests, citizens will report preferences in line with their own strategic interest as supporters of these parties. However, they might have never taken part in self-interested considerations. The second explanatory approach, the mechanism of affectivity, considers the possibility that citizens do not take part in substantive reviews of their situation and how to protect or change it. Rather, they might have “reflexive” emotions of (dis)content to their experiences, leading them to “favor change for the change’s sake” (Biggers 2019: 1029, 1043). Again, citizens might report preferences in line with their self-interest, however, they must not have participated in rational thought processes.

In reflection of the different causal propositions, a small set of recent papers, which relies on the winner-loser literature, evaluates explicitly what the underlying operating mechanisms are and if strategy really plays the role many scholars claim. And indeed, it continuously details that citizens’ instrumental considerations are a valid explanation for the formation of more fluid preferences for participatory democracy and electoral reform.

Biggers (2019) conducts an experiment with political supporters in the US, framing various electoral reforms as beneficial or detrimental for either their own or the opposing party. He observes that citizens process the given information and react in line with their partisan self-interest, systematically supporting reforms that are beneficial for them and rejecting change that is portrayed as advantageous for the opposite party’s fortunes. He concludes that while most citizens express support for the abstract idea of procedural fairness, they turn off those beliefs in the light of partisan self-interest. Arnesen et al. (2021) carry out a similar framing experiment concerning the reform of Norway’s proportional representational system and replicate the findings of the previously introduced study. Norwegian voters are found to process the information they are given during the experiment and align their preferences concerning the proposed electoral reform with self-interested “outcome favourability” (Arnesen et al. 2021: 9). In another study, van der Does & Kantorowicz (2021) go one step further. In a series of survey experiments in the Netherlands, they first assess the importance of strategic considerations concerning the introduction of the direct-democratic instrument of participatory budgeting and

reassure the previous study's statements. In two further experiments they evaluate whether the effects of outcome favorability are driven by self-interested or rather sociotropic motivations. They understand the former as being concerned with personal gains, while the latter reflects "concerns with the wider community" (van der Does & Kantorowicz 2021: 2). They find that both mechanisms are at play, however, self-interest is more important.<sup>9</sup>

Werner (2020) conducts survey research in the Netherlands. She reports that referendum preferences are less an expression of stable ideological beliefs concerning an intrinsic value attributed to the direct-democratic instrument, but rather a reflection of fluid and output-oriented considerations. Firstly, citizen support for the utilization of referendums varies across individuals, with those who believe to be part of the majority on a specific policy proposal, and therefore expecting to belong to the winning side, being significantly more approving of it. Secondly, it varies within individuals across policy issues, with citizens being more strongly in favor of holding a referendum if it is on an issue they perceive as salient. Landwehr & Harms (2020) find the same majority effect for Germany. Beyond that, they underline the evidence on non-stable referendum support within individuals, as citizens appear to prefer referendums on issues they perceive as easier, while they endorse parliamentary or expert decisions on topics they perceive as complicated.<sup>10</sup>

Steiner & Landwehr (2023) observe that after the Brexit referendum, approval for the mechanism declined among politically informed pro-European Germans. Their finding underlines that citizens update their preferences based on the processing of new political information. Additionally, outcome favorability in relation to issue beliefs, such as positions on the European integration, appears to play a significant role in preference formation. That indicates that non-ideological mechanisms are operative. The authors rule out the influence of party cues, however, they do not control for the affectivity explanation.

Informed by the studies on populist preferences for direct democracy (see chapter 2.1), Werner & Jacobs (2022) evaluate whether populist citizens' support for referendums is stable and

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<sup>9</sup> Even though the authors of this study reflect on an important aspect with their conceptions of self-interest and sociotropy, in the remainder of this paper, I will not differentiate between the two. Instead, I subsume them to be part of strategic self-interested considerations alike, as both motivations are reflections of a broader concept of self-interest that does not equal the classical 'homo oeconomicus' perspective of maximizing one's own gain. That view is informed by the empirical literature, which observes that human behavior is often not only shaped by personal gains, but also by the gains of others as well as by cognitive processes of 'satisficing' (Minnameier 2013).

<sup>10</sup> This effect had originally been proposed by Wojcieszak (2014).

driven by ideology or more fluid as a reflection of instrumental motives. In line with the works on strategic motivations, they expect populists to be less in favor of referendums if they believe they will lose, and to be less inclined to acknowledge the outcome if they do lose. However, they reject both hypotheses. Populists are exceptionally endorsing of referendums, even if they expect to lose, and they are more inclined to accept the outcome if they do lose. That underlines that their approval of direct democracy is ideologically motivated and stable.

## 2.4 Research Gap

Even though ideological and satisfaction-related motives appear to be important, I conclude from the literature review that short-term self-interest and particularly strategically perceived winner-loser effects constitute valid co-explanations for procedural and specifically direct-democratic preferences. Yet, there is a pronounced research gap that needs to be addressed.

In the existing research, incumbent party supporters are often seen as winners, and opposition party supporters are considered losers. Some works additionally cover those who have lost in multiple elections as repeated losers or include supporters of minority parties (see, e.g., Wenzel et al. 2000; Anderson et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2010). Moreover, one recent study evaluates the self-perceptions of winner-loser status instead of referring to ‘objective’ measures (see Donovan et al. 2023). Strikingly, however, no fundamental theoretical understanding exists about what exactly political winning and losing are and how such experiences are inherently related to the concepts of political power of citizens and, in representative systems, parties.

To my knowledge, no work points out the importance of that research gap, let alone develops a comprehensive argumentative framework that relates a sophisticated understanding of winning and losing to self-interested preference formations. The lack of an elaborated image on the matter is not only unsatisfactory from a theoretical perspective but also leads to the consequence that there is little empirical evidence for the explanatory value of different degrees of winning and losing for direct-democratic support. In other words, we do not know which factors really determine the winner-loser status of citizens, which factors relate to the citizens’ perceptions, and which are most important in explaining direct-democratic endorsement.

The empirical gap is intensified by the fact that studies that test winner-loser effects with regards to direct-democratic support, are nearly all limited in their scope to a small number or even single countries, foremost the US. Those studies that rely on a cross-country database mostly do not evaluate winner-loser effects in relation to participatory preferences (see chapter 2.2). Scholars that do, focus on very specific instruments (see Pilet et al. 2023). These considerations underline the need for theoretical specification and the expansion of empirical evidence.

### 3 Theory

In an attempt to reduce the research gap and add to the canon on direct-democratic preferences, specifically the literature that focuses on self-interest, below I present a substantiation of the idea that individual preferences concerning the participatory democracy are less reflections of ideological predispositions on how democracy should be practiced, but rather the result of strategic consideration on whether current representative procedures are expected to create results that are in line with the individual's interest (Smith et al. 2010; Biggers 2019; Landwehr & Harms 2020; Werner 2020). During the exposition I introduce a framework that specifies concepts of party and citizen power as well as corresponding degrees of political winner-loser status and how these relate to preference formation.

It is important to note that my argument focuses on the role of electoral and party politics in preference formation and only seeks to explain the preferences of voters. Excluded from the analysis are non-voters because I assume their direct-democratic approval to be a stable normative rejection of representative democracy and, therefore, to be best explained by the 'dissatisfaction thesis' (see chapter 2.1).<sup>11</sup>

My argument is, in parts, not new but relies on the presented literature concerned with winner-loser effects and self-interested preference adjustments (see chapters 2.2 & 2.3). However, I add new theoretical elements, especially with the considerations on citizen and party power and its relationship to preference formation. Additionally, to my knowledge, no paper has developed the causal model of the argument as explicitly as done in the following chapter.

#### 3.1 Assumptions

The argument is based on two overarching assumptions that are expected to work together in the formation of direct-democratic approval. Firstly, I expect citizens, especially those that participate in the electoral arena, to be self-interested political actors. That indicates that they wish the political system to be responsive to their will. In other words, citizens want political decisions to be aligned with their self-interest. Self-interest is conceptualized not only in the sense of personal gain but can also include more sociotropic motives (see footnote 9).

Secondly, I rely on the assumption of informed citizens, specifically voters. This premise plays a role in a set of steps in the causal model. Foremost, it indicates that citizens know that they

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<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, I do not know of any research specifically investigating the motivations of non-voter preferences concerning direct democracy. Hence, a closer inspection would be a worthwhile future project.

need political power to influence policymaking towards producing outputs that are aligned with their self-interest.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it comprises that they know about the importance of elections and the intermediary role of parties for their personal potential to be influential in politics. In other words, I assume citizens to be informed on their own ‘objective’ status in the political arena and to translate it into subjective perceptions. Additionally, I assume that they know about alternative models of decision-making. Specifically, I expect them to be aware of participatory democracy and its instruments of direct citizen power. The last supposition is informed by the popular support direct democracy enjoys worldwide (Leininger 2015) as well as the reflection that participatory mechanisms of decision-making bypass representation, making them a direct counter-project to the current norm of representative democracy. In the light of the previously presented literature on strategic considerations as well as winner-loser effects in the formation of process preferences, I regard the remaining assumptions as sufficiently justified.

### **3.2 Causal Model**

In a representative democracy, citizens mostly cannot directly influence policy decisions. Instead, they participate in elections, during which they formally legitimize officials to represent them in the political arena. (Dalton et al. 2001; Gabriel 2020). In other words, the representative system mostly limits citizen power to a process in which the voter confers the right upon politicians to exert power on her behalf.

In most representative democracies, citizens do not legitimize independent politicians to influence policies in their name, but party organizations, or politicians that are simultaneously representatives of a party. Consequently, parties hold a special role in the political arena (Singh 1950; McCarty & Schickler 2018). They operate as intermediaries (Müller 2000), and might even be seen as constituting monopolies for the direct exertion of power in the decision-making process (Crain et al. 1979). Hence, I understand the potential for politics to be responsive to the citizen’s self-interest to be regulated by how much power his supported party holds,<sup>13</sup> and in consequence, party power to determine the respective supporters’ ‘access to power’.

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<sup>12</sup> I apply a narrow conception of political power in this study. It is understood in terms of decision-making power as the potential of actors to accomplish or prevent policies against the will of other actors. This conception relies on an early work of Robert Dahl (1957) and differentiations by Bachrach and Baratz (1962).

<sup>13</sup> I do not equate party power and the responsiveness of the decision-making process to the voter’s interest but speak of ‘potential’, as research indicates that parties might change their positions once they become more likely to be able to substantially influence policymaking (Romeijn 2018).

As informed individuals, citizens know that in the representative system, their access to power, and hence, the potential for politics to be responsive to their will, is mediated by their supported party's capacity to influence policies. Simultaneously, as self-interested individuals that want policy outputs to be aligned with their wishes, citizens want their supported party to be influential so that they themselves hold substantial access to power. However, elections necessarily produce losers and winners; gaps between desired and effective access to power are inevitable. Individuals know about the significance of elections and understand their own status as a result of said process. However, they do not think within the boundaries of the representative system but are aware of alternatives. Citizens will now strategically format their preferences concerning different models of decision-making based on how much they find these alternatives, including direct democracy, to help them reach their goals.

Precisely, the causal process of (direct-democratic) preference formation functions as follows: The less power the citizen's supported party holds, and in consequence, the more drastic the gap between the effective and desired access to power, the higher the probability the citizen concludes the political processes to leave him on the losing side of politics. Consequently, he will find that the representative procedures are unlikely to produce results that are in line with his self-interest. As he continuously assesses alternative models of decision-making, including direct democracy, he is likely to judge which is better suited to make politics responsive to his will. In turn, he is incentivized to approve changes in general political procedures. His strategic incentive to support institutional reform is increased by the fact that there is no or only a small threat to his access to power. In other words, he has less to lose and more to gain if alternative models of decision-making are introduced. Vice versa, citizens who have more access to power are hypothesized to have a higher probability of understanding the current processes to leave them on the winning side of politics. In turn, these citizens have little to no incentive to endorse changes in the processes that have brought them success in the political arena, especially as the introduction of other models of decision-making constitutes a threat to their access to power (Gabriel 2013; Biggers 2019). As the political process of power allocation via elections is unending by design and, hence, continuously changes which party holds which power status, citizens will process their changing access to power and fluidly reformat their preferences.

Based on the evidence that citizens take part in instrumental considerations concerning their direct-democratic support (see chapter 2.3), I expect strategy to be the mechanism at play in the proposed causal model.

### 3.3 Hypotheses

The core idea of my argumentation is that citizens' perception of how likely the political system is responsive to their interests is key in shaping their strategically formed preferences for alternative democratic instruments. As in representative systems, that potential is mediated by their supported party, the concept of 'access to power' was introduced. However, political influence differs from party to party; hence, access to power differs between citizens. But what constitutes a party's potential to influence policies and, consequently, the supporter's access to power? In other words, what should citizens focus on when they evaluate whether they expect politics to be responsive to them? The assessment of this question is crucial because only by the specification of 'access to power' the argument can be evaluated empirically.

Party power and subsequently the supporting citizen's access to power I understand to be a result of two broader factors, which together form my concept of a party's 'power integration' within the political arena. First of all, and most obviously, how powerful a party is, is determined by its popular support during the electoral process. In other words, by how many individuals decide to vote for the party in relation to how many cast a ballot for others. This measure effectively determines which parties continue to become part of the government. I see being in an executive position as the most promising way to influence decision-making in electoral democracy, and hence, understand government party supporters as having the most access to power. Consequently, I expect them to be incentivized to support the status quo and to be opposed to the introduction of direct-democratic instruments. Hypotheses 1 (H1) reads: *Government party supporters are systematically less supportive of direct democracy.*

Apart from being decisive of governmental prospects, the electoral vote share also determines the seat distribution in parliament, which in turn decides which party holds what legislative capacity. Beyond officeholders also opposition parties profit from a strong base in parliament, as it might grant them the option to block policies and pressure executive parties towards changing policy proposals in their interest. Beyond that, as a result of public support, the parliamentary strength reflects party legitimacy, possibly fostering negotiating prospects. Consequently, I expect the party's seat share to be influential concerning its supporters' access to power. Hypothesis (H2) reads: *The higher the relative strength of the citizen's supported party in parliament, the lower her support for direct democracy, and vice versa.*

The second broad factor goes beyond a straightforward measure of relative vote share. To comprehend the present power as well as the prospects of parties, a conceptualization must include an evaluation of past power. The winner-loser literature indicates that there is a

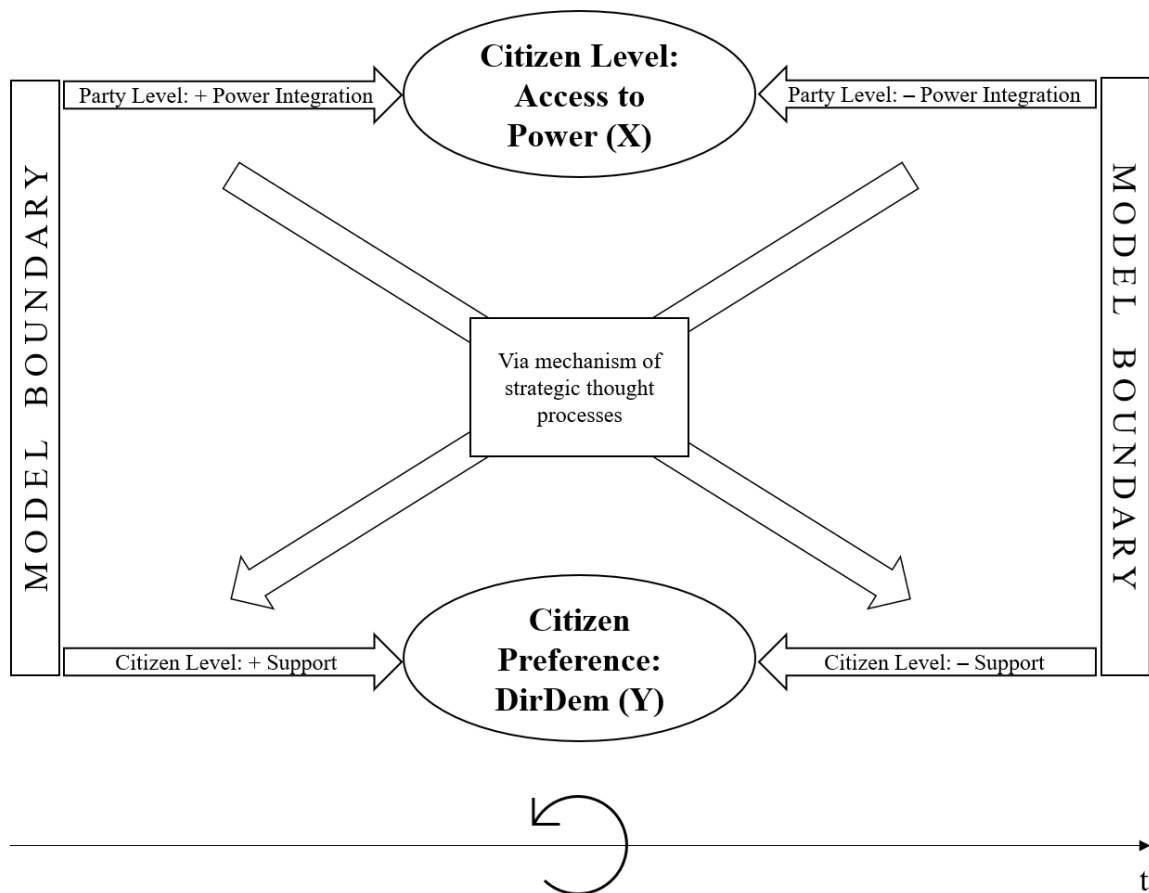
difference between voters of parties that lost in the last election and those that support parties that have now repeatedly been in opposition (Anderson et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2010). Such long-term losers should have less access to power as their parties are less well established within the political arena. Hence, their supporters are expected to have a higher incentive to prefer direct democracy. Accordingly, hypotheses 3 (H3) reads: *The longer the supported party has been in opposition, the higher the citizen's support for direct democracy.*

The idea that past power and establishment within the political arena are indicative of present and future power prospects also relies on the research concerning “challenger parties” and “mainstream parties” (de Vries & Hobolt 2012: 250), which differentiates between those who are or have already been in government positions and those who have not. Mainstream parties hold a status as long-established institutions, while challenger parties might be perceived as “political outsiders” (de Vries & Hobolt 2020: 17) and a potential threat by the other political actors (de Vries & Hobolt 2012). Thus, voters of such parties are understood to have the least access to power in relation to other party supporters and to be most highly incentivized to support direct-democratic instruments. Hypotheses 4 (H4) reads: *Challenger party supporters are systematically more likely to support direct democracy than voters of mainstream parties.*

### **3.4 Full Argument**

In a condensed form, my argument is the following: How a political system is constituted determines who holds what power to influence decision-making. In representative systems citizens possess no direct power. Instead, they vote for parties that exert power on their behalf. A party's power is determined by its vote share and by how powerful it was in the past. I term the corresponding measure ‘power integration’. Parties operate as intermediaries, and their power integration determines the ‘access to power’ their supporters hold. There are varying degrees of power integration that correspond to varying degrees of the party's supporters' access to power. These can simultaneously be conceptualized as the citizens' positions on the spectrum of political winners or losers. Citizens know to what degree their party is integrated within the political arena. They understand that their status is a result of political procedures, and they know that alternatives to these procedures exist. Their evaluation of their own access to power serves as a basis for the self-interested adjustment of their direct-democratic approval. In representative systems, those with less access to power are expected to be more inclined to support direct democracy, and vice versa.

Figure 1: Own visualization of theoretical argument



## 4 Data and Methods

The following chapter will present the methodology of this paper. That includes the presentation of the employed database, the operationalization of dependent and independent variables, the statistical models and control variables, as well as limitations to my research design.

### 4.1 Database

The European Social Survey (ESS ERIC 2023) is used to empirically test the proposed argument and answer the research question: *In how far does variation in the citizens' access to power explain their preferences concerning the practice of direct democracy?* Data from ESS wave ten, which was gathered between 2020 and 2022, is employed for the dependent variable of support for direct democracy, the control variables, as well as the independent variables of power integration, i.e., access to power.<sup>14</sup> The latter are coded manually. For additional information, which was needed to code the independent variables, I referred to the latest update

<sup>14</sup> Exclusively wave ten of the ESS is advanced, as from the recent updates, only this one, with its focus on 'democracy', includes the dependent variable of this study.

of the Comparative Political Dataset (Armingeon et al. 2023), the latest ParlGov update (Döring et al. 2022), the European Journal of Political Research’s Political Data Yearbooks (ECPR 2023) and the V-Dem Dataset (Coppedge et al. 2022).

This paper draws on data from 20 European democracies, which leaves a total of around 35,000 respondents. However, due to missing values in the dependent, independent, and control variables, the total number of observations decreases to around 15,000–20,000, depending on the employed independent variable. As all observations are measured at the respondent level, the analysis is based on the assessment of micro-level data. However, the research design is additionally interested in European-level dynamics.

The sample includes most European countries that were democratic in 2020, based on the evaluation of V-Dem, and are included in the ESS wave ten. The case selection was done aiming at a coverage as broad as possible because this study seeks to answer if the proposed argument is generalizable across democratic countries.<sup>15</sup>

## 4.2 Operationalization

The ESS reports on the item *votedir*. It captures the respondent’s referendum support and is employed to operationalize the dependent variable (y) of support for direct democracy:

“Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general... ..that citizens have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums?”

It is coded as an ordinal individual-level variable and measured on an 11-point Likert-scale, ranging from 0= ‘not important at all’ up to 10= ‘extremely important for democracy in general’.

The power integration measures, i.e., the access to power degrees are treated as explanatory in this study. Their operationalization is less straight-forward than the dependent variable, as the ESS does not report on the proposed measures. In accordance with the argument made in chapter three and corresponding to the deduced hypotheses, four independent variables (x) that represent measures of the different degrees of party power are coded manually. The data for the measures is mostly derived from the ESS. For information on parliamentary seat share and government involvement, I rely on the CPDS and ParlGov. Despite the focus on party power, all independent variables are individual-level measures. The difference between party- and

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<sup>15</sup> A-Table 1 in the appendix shows the full sample as well as the excluded countries and reasons for their exclusion.

citizen-level is bridged by the variable *prtvtxx*. It captures which party the respondent voted for in the last national election in his or her country of residence.

Independent variable A, *vpingov*, indicates whether the party the respondent voted for in the last national election proceeded to take office and is in government at the time of analysis. It is coded as a binary variable with 0=no and 1=yes. It is employed to evaluate H1.

Variable B, *vpseatshare*, indicates the relative strength (seat share) of the party the respondent voted for in the last national election in the country's lower house. It is coded as a continuous variable ranging from "0" to "100", while higher numbers indicate higher seat shares. A value of "100" indicates that the respective party occupies 100% of the parliament's seats. This variable is employed to assess H2.

Independent variable C, *voutofgov*, displays how many years the party the respondent voted for in the last national election has not been in government. It is coded as a discrete variable with a value range of '0' to '41'. The value '0' implies that the respondent voted for a party that is now in government, while any value above indicates that the respondent's supported party has not been in office since the number of years according to the respective value. The variable goes up to '41' as this is the highest number of years a party in the sample has not been in office. It is employed to test the validity of H3. Note that parties that have never been in government are excluded from this variable. They are part of the next measure.

Variable D, *vchallngp*, indicates whether the party the respondent voted for in the last national election has ever been in government and, conclusively, is a mainstream party, or if it has not and, therefore, is a challenger party. It is coded as binary, with 0=no and 1=yes. The variable is employed to assess H4.

### **4.3 Methodology**

The analysis starts with a set of summary statistics to help gain a basic understanding of the dependent and independent variables as well as their distributions at the European level.

To answer the research question, the analysis subsequently tests the influence of the four power integration variables on citizen support for direct democracy. Hence, the research design is y-centered. To evaluate the explanatory value of the measures, a multivariate linear regression analysis of the 20 countries, which are included in the sample, is performed for ESS wave ten. Linear regression is employed because the dependent variable can be treated as continuous.

Eight different models, including varying control variables, are run to isolate the effects of access to power. Model one does not include controls, so preliminary insight can be gathered into the relationships and their directions. To control for first factors related to the ‘new politics’ and ‘dissatisfaction’ explanations of direct-democratic support, models two and three introduce standard sociodemographic and socioeconomic measures, including age, gender, education, and subjective feelings of economic security. Models four and five cover controls for ideology. Firstly, I account for the respondent’s self-placement on the left-right scale. Secondly, the individual’s stances towards immigration, redistribution and climate change are controlled for. Models six and seven deal specifically with the influence of political satisfaction as well as institutional and general trust. The last model includes an additional ideological variable that measures populist “people-centred attitudes” (Mohrenberg et al. 2021: 533).<sup>16</sup> All models are run four times, once for each key independent variable. The respective models are highlighted with the letters ‘A’ to ‘D’ to indicate which of the explanatory variables is employed.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond that, clustered standard errors (CSE’s) by country are calculated in all main models to prevent non-independent observations. Additionally, all models include fixed effects to control for country-level differences. To rule out disguised country dynamics that might distort the European-level effect, all models are repeated without CSE’s and with ‘jackknife’ resampling as a robustness check. It is important to control for country-level differences because, based on the literature review (see chapter 2), majoritarian systems can be expected to exhibit stronger effects, while those countries that utilize direct-democratic instruments to a higher degree, e.g., Switzerland, might display no significant or reversed effects.

Furthermore, note that voting for a party should be strongly related to individual ideological predispositions. Yet, party support is the basic building block of the independent variables, which seek non-ideological effects. In consequence, it is necessary to control for the possibility of multicollinearity in the study design. To avoid the issue of not knowing whether to attribute the statistical effect of the regression to partisan ideology or the respective voter’s access to power, the case selection ensures substantive variance in party ideology and the parties’ power status across countries. A-Table 3 displays pairwise correlations between the four independent variables and the ideological controls. The results show that multicollinearity is precluded.

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<sup>16</sup> It is tested in the last model because it can be considered as a partly tautological measure in relation to the dependent variable. In consequence, I expect it to significantly influence the regression effect.

<sup>17</sup> A-Table 2 in the appendix shows all independent variables, control variables, and their operationalization.

#### 4.4 Limitations

The study comes with a set of methodological and theoretical limitations. As a linear regression analysis is conducted, no causal inference is possible from the results. Although I attempt to rule out all alternative explanations for direct-democratic preferences with the inclusion of corresponding control variables, it is possible that other influential factors have not been considered. Additionally, the potential of an inverse relationship between the dependent and independent variables cannot be precluded. Even though I laid out why access to power is expected to be explanatory, it is also possible that referendum preferences lead citizens to vote for the parties they see as aligned with those preferences. In consequence, their access to power would originate in their prior endorsement of participatory decision-making options.

Beyond that, the argument cannot be entirely inspected in this paper because, due to the research design, it must remain unclear what causal mechanism exactly is at play in the formation of the respondents' process preferences (under the presumption that a statistical effect is observed). Significant relationships between the dependent and independent variables would indicate the respondent's alignment of her direct-democratic preferences with his self-interest, while it cannot be proven whether that was due to strategic considerations or to alternative mechanisms such as party cues or affective reactions to winning or losing experiences (Biggers 2019). Whereas affectivity is made unlikely to be operative since a dissatisfaction control is included in the analysis, party cues cannot be ruled out at all. To be certain, an analysis would need to include a measure of party-level preferences regarding participatory democracy and employ it as a control variable. However, such a measure was not available to me, and the time frame of the project did not allow to collect the data.

Beyond that, the theoretical argument of this paper includes the premise that process preferences are not stable but fluid in response to new information. However, based on the database, this study cannot empirically assess that expectation. The fluidity of process preference adjustments to self-interest could best be evaluated within individuals across time, with the help of panel data. Such data polls the same sample of respondents at different points in time and can therefore observe changes within individuals' responses. A small number of studies have relied on panel data to test the fluidity of process preferences, also specifically referendum support (see Smith et al. 2010; Steiner & Landwehr 2023). However, at the time of writing this paper, no broad cross-country panel dataset that includes the items to carry out the present analysis was available, which effectively renders the testing of the fluidity of direct-democratic support unfeasible in this project.

Lastly, this analysis wants to test the predictive value of access to power on the approval of participatory democracy. However, the ESS limits the choice for a measure of direct-democratic preferences to referendum support. Referendums are arguably the most important participatory instrument, but they are by far not the only one. Potentially, citizens could vary in their endorsement of different direct-democratic mechanisms. The analysis thus only allows for a narrower statement on the influence of access to power on referendum support and not for a general statement on preferences concerning participatory democracy.

## 5 Results

This chapter presents the outcomes of the empirical analysis. It starts with summary statistics on the (in)dependent variables. Thereafter, the results of the regression analysis are reported.

### 5.1 Summary Statistics

A-Table 3 in the appendix displays summary statistics for the dependent variable. Around 34,000 individuals stated referendum preferences. The mean lies at around eight, with a standard deviation (SD) of around two, indicating that referendum support is remarkably high among citizens across the 20 European countries in the sample.

A-Table 4 again presents summary statistics of the dependent variable, but only for those respondents who are included in the regression analysis. Due to missing values, the actual sample size is reduced to 15,000 for the testing of independent variable C and around 20,000 for the testing of independent variables A, B, and D. It is shown that referendum support for the original and reduced actual sample of the study does not really differ. Those that are included in the statistical analysis are equally highly supportive of referendums, with a mean of  $\approx$ eight and a variance of  $\approx$ two.

A-Table 3 displays descriptive statistics for the independent variables. The central tendency for variable A lies at  $\approx$ 0.51, indicating that the number of government party voters in the sample is nearly equal to that of opposition party voters. The mean value of variable B is  $\approx$ 0.2 with an SD of 14,352, denoting substantial variation in the degree to which the respondents' supported parties hold legislative power. The mean of variable C lies at 1.3 with a variance of 2.6, which reveals that most respondents did not vote for a party that had been out of government for a long time. Lastly, the mean value of variable D lies at around 0.22, indicating that nearly one-fourth of all respondents voted for a party that had never been in an executive position.

A-Table 5 reports summary statistics for the control variables. All central tendency values move around the median of the respective variables, except for the ideology measure of the people-elite relationship (*viepol*), which reveals that around three-quarters of respondents share populist notions of people-centrism.

## 5.2 Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis

Independent variable A (*vpingov*) is the first explanatory variable that is assessed for its predictive value concerning the dependent variable of referendum support. It captures whether the respondent voted for a government or opposition party and is employed here to assess H1: *Government party supporters are systematically less supportive of direct democracy.*

Table 1 below displays the results of the main regression run with variable A, which includes all eight models (displayed in the columns labeled as 1 to 8), the control variables (displayed in the unlabeled column at the left), as well as fixed effects and clustered standard errors.

**Table 1: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. A; including fixed effects and CSE's**

|   | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|   | (1)                           | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 | (5)                 | (6)                 | (7)                 | (8)                 |
| <b>Ind. var. A: Government party voter (<i>vpingov</i>)</b> | -0.146<br>(-1.91)             | -0.179*<br>(-2.37)  | -0.165*<br>(-2.16)  | -0.157<br>(-1.98)   | -0.166*<br>(-2.31)  | -0.133<br>(-2.05)   | -0.111<br>(-1.70)   | -0.0684<br>(-1.18)  |
| Age   |                               | 0.00279<br>(1.50)   | 0.00265<br>(1.43)   | 0.00259<br>(1.38)   | 0.000149<br>(0.09)  | 0.000436<br>(0.25)  | 0.000619<br>(0.37)  | 0.00105<br>(0.70)   |
| Sex   |                               | 0.189***<br>(4.13)  | 0.177***<br>(3.92)  | 0.173**<br>(3.73)   | 0.0792<br>(1.66)    | 0.0757<br>(1.59)    | 0.0756<br>(1.60)    | 0.0571<br>(1.41)    |
| Education   |                               | -0.0222<br>(-1.74)  | -0.0166<br>(-1.35)  | -0.0179<br>(-1.48)  | -0.0143<br>(-1.34)  | -0.0147<br>(-1.39)  | -0.0132<br>(-1.28)  | -0.0102<br>(-1.15)  |
| Domicile  |                               | 0.0501*<br>(2.21)   | 0.0478*<br>(2.17)   | 0.0526*<br>(2.52)   | 0.0501**<br>(2.99)  | 0.0496**<br>(3.06)  | 0.0522**<br>(3.19)  | 0.0471**<br>(3.09)  |
| Income distress   |                               |                     | 0.145**<br>(3.84)   | 0.147***<br>(4.09)  | 0.0742*<br>(2.10)   | 0.0624<br>(1.78)    | 0.0475<br>(1.25)    | 0.0323<br>(0.88)    |
| Left-right scale  |                               |                     |                     | 0.00558<br>(-0.27)  | 0.0375<br>(1.91)    | 0.0411<br>(2.03)    | 0.0429*<br>(2.12)   | 0.0339<br>(2.01)    |
| Immigration attitudes                                       |                               |                     |                     |                     | -0.0123<br>(-0.72)  | -0.00518<br>(-0.28) | 0.00584<br>(0.33)   | 0.00349<br>(0.22)   |
| Redistribution attitudes                                    |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.280***<br>(10.16) | 0.279***<br>(10.17) | 0.280***<br>(10.40) | 0.151***<br>(9.57)  |
| Climate change distress                                     |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.0167<br>(0.47)    | 0.0199<br>(0.58)    | 0.0167<br>(0.54)    | 0.0242<br>(0.90)    |
| Satisfaction w. democracy                                   |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     | -0.0342<br>(-2.00)  | -0.00461<br>(-0.26) | 0.00333<br>(0.20)   |
| Political trust   |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | -0.0775*<br>(-2.84) | -0.0509*<br>(-2.21) |
| General trust   |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.00496<br>(0.67)   | 0.00132<br>(0.20)   |
| People-centrism   |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.315***<br>(15.53) |
| _cons   | 8.161***<br>(187.44)          | 7.902***<br>(35.98) | 7.616***<br>(34.90) | 7.648***<br>(44.12) | 5.713***<br>(15.19) | 5.849***<br>(14.66) | 5.920***<br>(14.42) | 4.675***<br>(12.53) |
| N   | 20322                         | 19672               | 19509               | 18822               | 18212               | 18150               | 17504               | 17318               |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Model 1A calculates the regression without any control variables. It reports a negative correlation of around -0.15 between the variables, indicating that government party voters are around 15% less likely to be supportive of referendums than opposition party voters. However, the effect is insignificant, which implies that the relationship is random. Model 2A introduces socio-demographic controls, which increases the regression coefficient to around -0.18 and makes it significant at  $p < 0.05$ . The same holds true for model 3A, which controls for subjective feelings of income distress. With the inclusion of the first ideological control, self-placement on the left-right scale, the effect decreases to around -0.157 and is rendered insignificant again. Model 5A introduces the additional ideological measures of immigration and redistribution attitudes as well as feelings of climate change distress. Yet again, the effect increases to -0.166 and becomes significant at  $p < 0.05$ . In models 6 and 7A, satisfaction with democracy as well as general and political trust are held constant, which renders the coefficients insignificant and decreases them to around -0.11. Lastly, with the introduction of people-centrism in model 8A, the effect stays insignificant and reduces to around -0.068. Not shown here, the inclusion of the last control variable lets the r-squared value of the regression leap from around 0.14 to around 0.22, which hints towards the validity of the expectation that it is tautological to the dependent variable in its measurement (see footnote 16).

A-Tables 7 and 8 report robustness checks of the regression results for variable A, one without CSE's and one without CSE's but with 'jackknife' resampling. In both runs, the regression coefficients are equal to those in the main analysis; however, in contrast to the main regression analysis, across the first seven models, the effects are found to be strongly significant at  $p < 0.001$ . Even in the last model, with the inclusion of people-centrism, the effect is not rendered insignificant but only decreased to  $p < 0.05$ .

Despite the direction of the relationship being negative, as expected, and its significance in the robustness runs, H1 is rejected. The control for non-independent observations in the main analysis, as well as the introduction of subjective measures of satisfaction and trust, indicate that the difference in referendum support between government and opposition party voters, *ceteris paribus*, is random or confounded by another factor.

The second factor is independent variable B (*vpseatshare*). It captures the parliamentary seat share of the party voted for and is employed to assess H2: *The higher the relative strength of the citizen's supported party in parliament, the lower her support for direct democracy, and vice versa*. Table 2 below displays the results of the main regression run with variable B, including fixed effects and clustered standard errors.

## Results

**Table 2: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. B; including fixed effects and CSE's**

|  | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                     |                     |                     |                      |                     |                      |                     |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|  | (1)                           | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 | (5)                  | (6)                 | (7)                  | (8)                 |
| <b>Ind. var. B: Parliament seat share (<i>vpseatshare</i>)</b> | 0.00394<br>(-1.35)            | 0.00493<br>(-1.70)  | 0.00458<br>(-1.60)  | 0.00495<br>(-1.78)  | -0.00352<br>(-1.23)  | -0.00232<br>(-0.87) | -0.00167<br>(-0.62)  | 0.000460<br>(-0.18) |
| Age  |                               | 0.00266<br>(1.34)   | 0.00253<br>(1.28)   | 0.00250<br>(1.25)   | 0.0000382<br>(-0.02) | 0.000300<br>(0.17)  | 0.000486<br>(0.28)   | 0.000955<br>(0.63)  |
| Sex  |                               | 0.182***<br>(4.06)  | 0.170**<br>(3.85)   | 0.168**<br>(3.70)   | 0.0730<br>(1.57)     | 0.0701<br>(1.51)    | 0.0701<br>(1.52)     | 0.0524<br>(1.33)    |
| Education  |                               | -0.0228<br>(-1.80)  | -0.0170<br>(-1.39)  | -0.0182<br>(-1.51)  | -0.0142<br>(-1.35)   | -0.0145<br>(-1.39)  | -0.0130<br>(-1.28)   | -0.00980<br>(-1.12) |
| Domicile   |                               | 0.0504*<br>(2.25)   | 0.0481*<br>(2.21)   | 0.0528*<br>(2.58)   | 0.0497**<br>(3.04)   | 0.0489**<br>(3.11)  | 0.0516**<br>(3.24)   | 0.0467**<br>(3.11)  |
| Income distress  |                               |                     | 0.150***<br>(3.93)  | 0.152***<br>(4.16)  | 0.0795*<br>(2.23)    | 0.0656<br>(1.87)    | 0.0505<br>(1.33)     | 0.0352<br>(0.95)    |
| Lr-scale   |                               |                     |                     | 0.00106<br>(-0.05)  | 0.0406<br>(2.09)     | 0.0437*<br>(2.15)   | 0.0449*<br>(2.22)    | 0.0349<br>(2.07)    |
| Immigration attitudes  |                               |                     |                     |                     | -0.0141<br>(-0.83)   | -0.00548<br>(-0.30) | 0.00597<br>(0.34)    | 0.00388<br>(0.26)   |
| Redistribution attitudes                                       |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.279***<br>(10.15)  | 0.278***<br>(10.17) | 0.280***<br>(10.40)  | 0.151***<br>(9.65)  |
| Climate change distress  |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.0164<br>(0.46)     | 0.0203<br>(0.59)    | 0.0176<br>(0.56)     | 0.0258<br>(0.96)    |
| Satisfaction w. democracy                                      |                               |                     |                     |                     |                      | -0.0382*<br>(-2.16) | -0.00744<br>(-0.42)  | 0.000992<br>(0.06)  |
| Political trust  |                               |                     |                     |                     |                      |                     | -0.0797**<br>(-2.89) | -0.0526*<br>(-2.27) |
| General trust  |                               |                     |                     |                     |                      |                     | 0.00570<br>(0.77)    | 0.00208<br>(0.31)   |
| People-centrism  |                               |                     |                     |                     |                      |                     |                      | 0.316***<br>(15.58) |
| _cons  | 8.172***<br>(116.75)          | 7.942***<br>(39.25) | 7.644***<br>(37.77) | 7.665***<br>(45.92) | 5.709***<br>(15.87)  | 5.851***<br>(15.22) | 5.916***<br>(15.01)  | 4.653***<br>(13.03) |
| <i>N</i>   | 20257                         | 19609               | 19446               | 18762               | 18152                | 18092               | 17447                | 17263               |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

In contrast to the analysis of variable A, the second regression analysis reports non-significant relationships throughout all models. The coefficient is negative, as expected. However, its size is found to be substantially lower than that of variable A. While it is around -0.004 in the first four models B, with the introduction of ideological as well as trust and satisfaction controls, it decreases to around -0.0017 in model 7B and to around -0.0005 in model 8B.

A-Tables 9 and 10 report the run of the same regression analysis without CSE's and with 'jackknife' resampling as robustness checks. Similarly to analysis A, the exclusion of CSE's does not influence the sizes of the regression coefficients but changes some of the models to produce significant results, specifically models 1 to 5B. This time, satisfaction and trust measures appear to be decisive for rendering the observations insignificant.

Despite finding the direction of the effect to be negative, as expected, the more systematic insignificance and the small size of the predictive value of independent variable B lead me to a strong rejection of H2: It cannot be concluded that voters whose party has a lower seat share in the national parliament are systematically more supportive of referendums.

## Results

The third explanatory variable that is tested is independent variable C (*voutofgov*). It captures for how long the party the respondent voted for in the last election has been out of government. It is employed to assess H3: *The longer the supported party has been in opposition, the higher the citizen's support for direct democracy*. Table 3 outlines the results of the third main regression run, including fixed effects as well as clustered standard errors.

**Table 3: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. C; including fixed effects and CSE's**

|  | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                      |                     |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|  | (1)                           | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 | (5)                 | (6)                 | (7)                  | (8)                 |
| <b>Ind. var. C: Years out of government (<i>voutofgov</i>)</b> | 0.0110<br>(0.60)              | 0.0155<br>(0.89)    | 0.0130<br>(0.76)    | 0.0123<br>(0.70)    | 0.00678<br>(0.39)   | 0.00529<br>(0.32)   | 0.00503<br>(0.31)    | 0.000982<br>(0.06)  |
| Age  |                               | 0.00302<br>(1.56)   | 0.00291<br>(1.53)   | 0.00283<br>(1.48)   | 0.000350<br>(0.20)  | 0.000425<br>(0.24)  | 0.000358<br>(0.20)   | 0.000683<br>(0.41)  |
| Sex  |                               | 0.223***<br>(4.11)  | 0.213***<br>(3.99)  | 0.210**<br>(3.83)   | 0.105<br>(2.00)     | 0.105<br>(1.99)     | 0.108<br>(2.06)      | 0.0871<br>(1.95)    |
| Education  |                               | -0.0204<br>(-1.59)  | -0.0150<br>(-1.20)  | -0.0170<br>(-1.37)  | -0.0157<br>(-1.41)  | -0.0158<br>(-1.42)  | -0.0147<br>(-1.38)   | -0.0121<br>(-1.26)  |
| Domicile   |                               | 0.0552*<br>(2.22)   | 0.0530*<br>(2.20)   | 0.0586*<br>(2.56)   | 0.0529*<br>(2.80)   | 0.0529**<br>(2.89)  | 0.0535*<br>(2.72)    | 0.0511*<br>(2.79)   |
| Income distress  |                               |                     | 0.136**<br>(3.72)   | 0.138***<br>(4.08)  | 0.0752*<br>(2.51)   | 0.0720*<br>(2.47)   | 0.0585<br>(1.84)     | 0.0340<br>(1.02)    |
| Lr-scale   |                               |                     |                     | 0.00715<br>(-0.39)  | 0.0367<br>(2.09)    | 0.0380*<br>(2.14)   | 0.0408*<br>(2.28)    | 0.0321<br>(2.09)    |
| Immigration attitudes  |                               |                     |                     |                     | -0.00577<br>(-0.29) | -0.00336<br>(-0.16) | 0.0103<br>(0.54)     | 0.00795<br>(0.45)   |
| Redistribution attitudes                                       |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.279***<br>(11.31) | 0.278***<br>(11.26) | 0.281***<br>(11.56)  | 0.157***<br>(10.89) |
| Climate change distress  |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.0294<br>(0.88)    | 0.0313<br>(0.95)    | 0.0274<br>(0.87)     | 0.0324<br>(1.17)    |
| Satisfaction w. democracy                                      |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     | -0.0126<br>(-0.80)  | 0.0188<br>(0.98)     | 0.0218<br>(1.21)    |
| Political trust  |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | -0.0808**<br>(-2.92) | -0.0583*<br>(-2.41) |
| General trust  |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.00286<br>(0.31)    | 0.000805<br>(0.10)  |
| People-centrism  |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                      | 0.301***<br>(15.62) |
| _cons  | 8.078***<br>(377.26)          | 7.686***<br>(39.58) | 7.421***<br>(37.57) | 7.468***<br>(42.46) | 5.504***<br>(14.57) | 5.564***<br>(14.37) | 5.666***<br>(14.15)  | 4.557***<br>(12.46) |
| <i>N</i>   | 15559                         | 15094               | 14975               | 14499               | 14017               | 13980               | 13481                | 13325               |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

A similar result to the analysis of variable B is found. The correlation effect is positive, indicating that the direction of the relationship between referendum support and independent variable C is as expected. However, again, the size of the relationship is very small at around 0.011, decreasing to around 0.001 in the last model. Additionally, neither any of the main models nor the runs without CSE's as well as 'jackknife' report significant effects (see A-Tables 11 and 12). Ultimately, H3 is strongly rejected.

The fourth and last explanatory variable tested is independent variable D (*vchallngp*). It captures whether the individual respondent voted for a challenger or a mainstream party in the last election. It is employed to assess H4: *Challenger party supporters are systematically more*

likely to support direct democracy than voters of mainstream parties. Table 4 shows the results of the last main regression run, including fixed effects as well as CSE's.

**Table 4: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. D; including fixed effects and CSE's**

|   | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|   | (1)                           | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 | (5)                 | (6)                 | (7)                 | (8)                 |
| <b>Ind. var. D: Challenger party voter (<i>vchallngp</i>)</b> | 0.226**<br>(2.96)             | 0.276**<br>(3.49)   | 0.264**<br>(3.25)   | 0.246**<br>(2.97)   | 0.233**<br>(3.18)   | 0.202**<br>(3.22)   | 0.169*<br>(2.78)    | 0.136*<br>(2.51)    |
| Age   |                               | 0.00325<br>(1.67)   | 0.00310<br>(1.60)   | 0.00303<br>(1.57)   | 0.000573<br>(0.33)  | 0.000817<br>(0.47)  | 0.000958<br>(0.57)  | 0.00131<br>(0.88)   |
| Sex   |                               | 0.190***<br>(4.05)  | 0.178**<br>(3.85)   | 0.174**<br>(3.63)   | 0.0781<br>(1.62)    | 0.0757<br>(1.58)    | 0.0757<br>(1.59)    | 0.0564<br>(1.38)    |
| Education   |                               | -0.0221<br>(-1.75)  | -0.0166<br>(-1.36)  | -0.0181<br>(-1.50)  | -0.0146<br>(-1.37)  | -0.0149<br>(-1.41)  | -0.0135<br>(-1.31)  | -0.0104<br>(-1.16)  |
| Domicile  |                               | 0.0528*<br>(2.34)   | 0.0505*<br>(2.30)   | 0.0549*<br>(2.65)   | 0.0527**<br>(3.23)  | 0.0517**<br>(3.28)  | 0.0540**<br>(3.39)  | 0.0498**<br>(3.40)  |
| Income distress   |                               |                     | 0.144**<br>(3.78)   | 0.145***<br>(3.99)  | 0.0755*<br>(2.15)   | 0.0629<br>(1.83)    | 0.0486<br>(1.31)    | 0.0327<br>(0.90)    |
| Lr-scale  |                               |                     |                     | 0.00543<br>(-0.27)  | 0.0375<br>(1.94)    | 0.0411<br>(2.04)    | 0.0427*<br>(2.12)   | 0.0333<br>(1.98)    |
| Immigration attitudes   |                               |                     |                     |                     | -0.0103<br>(-0.59)  | -0.00310<br>(-0.16) | 0.00760<br>(0.42)   | 0.00451<br>(0.28)   |
| Redistribution attitudes                                      |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.278***<br>(10.02) | 0.277***<br>(10.04) | 0.278***<br>(10.25) | 0.149***<br>(9.32)  |
| Climate change distress                                       |                               |                     |                     |                     | 0.0173<br>(0.48)    | 0.0202<br>(0.58)    | 0.0170<br>(0.54)    | 0.0237<br>(0.88)    |
| Satisfaction w. democracy                                     |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     | -0.0344<br>(-2.02)  | -0.00556<br>(-0.31) | 0.00314<br>(0.19)   |
| Political trust   |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | -0.0760*<br>(-2.83) | -0.0500*<br>(-2.22) |
| General trust   |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.00552<br>(0.76)   | 0.00193<br>(0.29)   |
| People-centrism   |                               |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.316***<br>(15.44) |
| _cons   | 8.060***<br>(1148.96)         | 7.747***<br>(38.20) | 7.472***<br>(37.73) | 7.510***<br>(46.42) | 5.573***<br>(15.04) | 5.739***<br>(14.76) | 5.828***<br>(14.38) | 4.626***<br>(12.57) |
| <i>N</i>  | 19990                         | 19359               | 19199               | 18536               | 17943               | 17884               | 17244               | 17060               |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Contrary to all other hypotheses, H4 is verified on the basis of the empirical results. Throughout all models, regardless of the exclusion or inclusion of clustered standard errors and jackknife resampling, variable D shows a significant positive relationship with referendum support. Across the first six models of the main analysis, challenger party voters are found to be around 20 to 27% more likely to be supportive of referendums, at a significance level of  $p < 0.01$ . The inclusion of trust controls as well as people-centrism in the last two models lowers the effect to 0.136, however, it stays significant at  $p < 0.05$ . In the robustness check models, without clustered standard errors as well as with 'jackknife' resampling, all observations are significant at  $p < 0.001$  (see A-Tables 13 and 14).

## 6 Discussion

In the following chapter, my empirical results will be put into context. First, I discuss what the data indicates in relation to the research question. Afterwards, I review how the findings link to the broader literature canon on direct-democratic preferences. Furthermore, I detail where the limitations of the study lie and what future research could do to clear remaining uncertainties. Lastly, I address the question what the research contributes to the scientific debate.

### 6.1 Findings

In this paper, I substantiated an argument in line with self-interest- and strategy-based explanations for direct-democratic support and posed the research question: *In how far does variation in the citizens' access to power explain their preferences concerning the practice of direct democracy?*

Contrary to my expectation, the results of the empirical analysis indicate that access to power alone is not sufficient to explain the approval of direct-democratic instruments across countries. While referendum support is exceptionally high across the whole sample, three out of four of the measures of the supported party's power integration do not predict variation in the respective voter's preferences.

Both H2 and H3 are strongly rejected, as neither long-term out-of-power voters nor those whose party holds less legislative capacity are revealed to be substantially and statistically significantly more favorable of referendums. Regarding H1, the picture is more nuanced. The data indicates that there is a difference between government and opposition party supporters in relation to direct-democratic preferences. The latter are observed to be up to 16,5% more likely to approve of referendums at statistical significance. However, once additional variables are held constant, the relationship is rendered insignificant and decreases, implying that the predictive effect cannot certainly be attributed to the variance in access to power between the two groups but is more likely to be the result of a confounding factor. In other words, while opposition party voters are more inclined to support referendums, it seems that it is not because they are opposition voters. In consequence, H1 is rejected too.

Interestingly, however, both the variable that is employed to assess H1 (*vpingov*), and the variable for the evaluation of H3 (*voutofgov*) include the differentiation between government and opposition party voters. Still, only the first one reveals a partly significant predictive effect at a substantial size. How can that variation be explained? I hypothesize it is the result of the exclusion of challenger party voters in the latter variable. While *vpingov* distinguishes between

government and opposition party voters, including those that support parties that have never been in government, challenger parties, *voutofgov* differentiates between in-power partisans, out-of-power partisans, and for how long their parties have not been in office. However, in doing so, it only includes voters of those parties who have already held an executive position, mainstream parties, while challenger party voters are omitted from the sample. Considering this, the confusion around the relationship between referendum support and the first variable, *vpingov*, might be clarified: The substantial positive relationship between opposition party voting and referendum support might be a distorted one. In reality it might not be propelled by the facts of being a government or opposition party supporter but rather by the inherent co-distinction between mainstream and challenger party voters. In other words, what is reflected in the data is not a gap between government-opposition voters but a gap between challenger and mainstream party supporters.

This interpretation appears valid, as the last independent variable of my access to power framework (*vchallngp*), which measures explicitly whether the respondent is a challenger or a mainstream party supporter, is predictive at a statistically significant level, *ceteris paribus*. Challenger party voters are revealed to be  $\approx 14\%$  more supportive of holding referendums than mainstream party voters, beyond ideological predispositions, different levels of trust and satisfaction, as well as socio-demographic and economic status. That confirms H4, and additionally, it sheds light on the inconclusive data concerning H1.

In short, the results indicate that, most certainly, how long one's party has been out of government as well as its parliamentary seat share do not relate to citizen preferences concerning referendums. There also appears to be no gap between opposition and government party supporters per se. However, there is a substantial and significant winner-loser gap between challenger and mainstream party supporters, with the former, as expected, being more inclined to endorse the direct-democratic instrument of referendums.

Consequently, I answer the research question as follows: *Most variation in access to power cannot satisfactorily explain citizens' direct democratic preferences. However, as those that are least integrated in the political arena exhibit a substantial preference gap in relation to all others, the general argument of citizens' self-interested preference adjustments is not rejected entirely but only insofar as it expected preference alignments in relation to lesser differences between citizens' access to power.*

### **6.1.1 The Winner-Loser Context**

How do these results fit in with the rest of the literature on direct-democratic preferences? First of all, my research is aligned with past studies that observe that approval of participatory democracy or the endorsement of holding referendums, respectively, is remarkably high across Europe (see, e.g., Donovan & Karp 2006). However, my results oppose certain findings in the literature on the winner-loser gap. Authors like Anderson et al. (2005), or Smith et al. (2010) find support for a difference between (long-term) opposition party voters and government party supporters in relation to their preferences concerning institutional change and direct democracy. I cannot replicate these observations at a statistically significant level. In the data, I neither find support for a government-opposition effect per se, nor for a difference between short-term and long-term losers. Yet, my results do not generally speak against the winner-loser gap but shift its area of validity. While there seem to be no winner-loser effects between mainstream party supporters with regard to their legislative capacity and time-dependent government-opposition status, they, as a whole, differ substantially from challenger party supporters, who are farthest away from being influential in politics.

How does this dissonance between my findings and earlier observations occur? I see two explanations. First, very few of the past studies evaluate winner-loser measures across a broad range of countries, and even less assess them specifically in relation to referendum support. Equally, those few that analyze referendum preferences are limited in their focus on single countries, mostly the US and other majoritarian systems. In short, my study is the first that assesses the explanatory power of these measures in relation to referendum endorsement in a broad cross-country analysis. Consequently, my results might indicate limits to the external validity of earlier research. Note that there is one paper that finds cross-European support for a government-opposition winner-loser effect, however, in relation to Deliberative Mini-Publics (Pilet et al. 2023). This highlights a limitation of my and that research alike: direct-democratic support is not necessarily equal to that of referendums or other participatory instruments. It would be a worthwhile future project to evaluate, how the preferences for distinct direct-democratic mechanisms relate to each other and if they are shaped by differing motives.

The second explanatory approach reflects my interpretation of the government-opposition effect observed in this study (see above). On that note, one option is, what past studies revealed and attributed as a gap between government and opposition party supporters was de facto one between mainstream and challenger party supporters. Alternatively, it is possible that they did reveal a government-opposition effect, but today, the cleavage has shifted and now is between mainstream and challenger parties. The latter interpretation is based on the idea that the

emergence of challenger parties has fundamentally restructured the European party systems and electoral politics (de Vries & Hobolt 2020). How much truth these explanatory impulses hold cannot be answered here but could be the basis for future empirical research.

### **6.1.2 Ideology vs. Self-Interest**

With the study, I wanted to contribute to the winner-loser literature but also to the broader academic debate on whether direct-democratic support is predominantly a matter of normative beliefs or is motivated by self-interest, strategy, and power calculations. Recent research had continuously highlighted the role of non-ideological factors in preference formation, also concerning referendums. My observations do so to a lesser extent and indirectly support the thesis that ideology and dissatisfaction are the main sources of direct-democratic approval.

First, while the result that challenger party voters are more supportive of referendums shows that strategic preference alignments play a role, none of the other access to power degrees are revealed to predict adjusted referendum support. It does not seem to matter systematically if a voter has (no) access to executive-power, for how long, or how much legislative support her party holds. This must not reflect a lack of self-interest per se; however, it seems exaggerated to think of citizens as systematically calculating every ‘little’ variation in their ‘objective’ access to power and reformatting their procedural preferences accordingly. Instead, it is the ‘big’ differences between voters’ power that appear to be translated into subjective perceptions and lead to readjustments in their endorsement of participatory means of governance.

Additionally, referendum support is remarkably pronounced across all voters in the sample, including supporters of mainstream parties. That signifies that also those who should be incentivized to safeguard the status quo are highly approving of institutional change, although it might threaten their own access to power.

Lastly, the analysis hints towards the importance of normative beliefs and dissatisfaction, as once these controls are introduced into the statistical models, many of the beforehand systematic effects of access to power are rendered insignificant and decreased in size.

Based on these results, it would be untenable for me not to consider that ideology and dissatisfaction are the central sources of direct-democratic approval and that preference formations that are primarily shaped by power-related self-interest are less frequent. To contribute to clarity, it would be instructive if future studies did not only evaluate either measures of self-interest and strategy or measures of ideology and dissatisfaction but would focus more on the weight of different explanations in relation to each other.

### 6.1.3 Uncertainties

Despite the support for ideology and political contentment, I want to highlight some limitations in my research that lead to uncertainties concerning the question of what the data can(not) say about the importance of self-interest as an explanation for referendum preferences.

Firstly, the study's hypotheses are built on the deduction of 'objective' measures of party power, which were conceptualized to determine access to power and decide what self-interested referendum preferences are. As only the difference between challenger and mainstream party voting was found to be predictive, it is likely that the other power degrees are not translated into subjective considerations that matter in relation to referendum approval. However, I cannot certainly conclude a lack of self-interest. Mainstream party voters might act strategically when they do not align their preferences with smaller variations in their executive and legislative positions because they expect to become powerful under the current procedures in the future. This consideration points out the limitations of using 'objective' measures of access to power. It would have been preferable to evaluate their relationship with subjective perceptions of political influence. However, as no such data was available, this is up to future research.

Secondly, access to power-related self-interest and referendum support may be connected less systematically than I expected, as citizens might come to a different conclusion in their rational thought processes than the argument suggested. Those that hold more or less access to power do so because they vote for parties that are equally more or less popular. It is a logical deduction – still possibly an inaccurate one – that the policies these parties stand for are equally unpopular. If citizens think like that, they will probably conclude that the introduction of referendums would have no effect on the responsiveness of the system to their interest, and they would see no reason to base their referendum preferences on their access to power. Future research could, for instance qualitatively, explore how exactly citizens' strategic conclusions look like, but also how they might differ between individuals. The latter is especially important as research, including mine, might overestimate the degree to which citizens are informed on referendums and direct democracy in general. Recent studies often worked with framing experiments, in which they gave the respondents substantial information about which institutional process shape their power prospects in which way. Consequently, they could observe strategic adjustments to procedural preferences (see Biggers 2019; Arnesen et al. 2021; van der Does & Kantorowicz 2021). However, in real-world scenarios citizens might not know about referendums and how they influence their power prospects. In consequence, strategic conclusions could potentially occur as less coherent than expected in this paper.

Lastly, my theoretical argument relies on the idea that citizens deduce their own access to power from how powerful their party is. In reasoning like that, I assume that citizens ‘have a party’ and share a strong ideological congruence or a normative connectedness, respectively, to it. If this premise was not tenable, there was no reason for me to expect citizens to equate their own access to power with the power of their party, as they would not necessarily expect it to influence politics in line with their interest. That in turn, would make it unwarranted to think that citizens base their self-interest on the proposed measures of access to power and align their process preferences accordingly. I think the supposition that people share content-related or ideological congruence with a party is not unfounded. However, it must be questioned to which degree that is valid, as research has addressed trends of decreasing partisanship (Dalton & Wattenberg 2002). Citizens might not only vote for a party because they are particularly in line with it. They could be taking part in protest voting, strategic voting, or they might see the according party as the ‘lesser evil’. Additionally, it is plausible that some people do not feel represented well by any party but still vote because they hope single content-related points in their program to be implemented. Citizens might also altogether be more focused on policy-outputs than on party power to evaluate the responsiveness of the system to their will. In all these cases, voters could hold higher or lower preferences for direct democracy than it was to be expected based on my measures of access to power. In other words, some citizens’ levels of direct democratic endorsement might be disconnected from how powerful the party is, they voted for. If these considerations are valid, my research opposes strategy as an important influencing factor to a lesser extent than discussed above because it would have relied on an inaccurate measure of access to power.<sup>18</sup> Yet, my argument would not be invalidated entirely. Instead, it would rather be applicable only for a narrower group of people, ‘real partisans’ that hold a strong connectedness to a party. On a statistical level that would mean that we could see an interaction effect between party voting and party connectedness concerning direct-democratic approval. Future studies could evaluate whether these qualifications to the argument hold any truth. My analysis could even be replicated on the basis of the same data, as the ESS offers an item that measures in how far citizens feel connected to which party.

### **6.1.4 Further Reflections**

Beyond these considerations, I want to point to other gaps in my study and the literature on direct-democratic preferences in general and highlight what could be done to close them.

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<sup>18</sup> Equally, much of the winner-loser gap research would need to undergo a reevaluation as it relies on this measure.

As detailed in the chapter on the study's limitations, the paper could not evaluate the fluidity of process preferences. Hence, it would be worthwhile to employ the access to power measures in a cross-country panel data study to test within-fluidity of direct-democratic support. Additionally, future research could employ the ESS waves six and ten (both include the item on referendum support) and assess how the preferences of challenger party voters in wave six (2010) relate to those of the voters of the same parties in wave ten (2020-2022). In some cases, parties that had challenger status in 2010 became mainstream parties in the meantime. In the light of my argument, their voters' referendum preferences should differ between the waves.

Additionally, as I could not strictly verify the mechanism at play in my argument, future research could evaluate whether challenger party voters take part in strategic considerations themselves or if the observed effect is a result of affective reactions or party cues. On that note, it would be interesting to link the evidence for preference formation at the citizen-level with that on elite-level preferences and evaluate how they relate to and influence each other. It could be, for instance, that elite cues are not the sole way of causal influence between parties and their supporters. Instead, the party supporters' remarkably high approval of direct-democratic instruments might likewise shape elite-level preferences.

Furthermore, my power integration framework could be worked out to be more nuanced. From a theoretical standpoint, beyond legislative and executive status, party power is also a question of how the political system constitutes decision-making processes. This view relies on the seminal works of George Tsebelis and Arend Lijphart that reflect procedural structures, institutional boundaries and "veto players" (Tsebelis 1995: 289) in different macropolitical contexts. For instance, in majoritarian two-party systems, a single government party can often decide upon policies without other parties being able to interfere (Tsebelis 1995). In proportional multi-party systems on the other hand, parties often need to form coalition-governments. Lijphart (1999: 30) understands such polities to follow a "consensus model of democracy" because political actors are required to cooperate and compromise for policies to be achieved. Research on winner-loser experiences already indicates that these macropolitical factors influence how citizens perceive themselves (Wenzel et al. 2000; Banducci & Karp 2003; Anderson et al. 2005). Yet, future research could evaluate in how far these effects apply to challenger party voters. Additionally, Lijphart (1999) points to the influence of federal elements on the distribution of decision-making power. As parties that gain a majority of votes on the national level are not necessarily equally successful on the sub-national level, federal systems can strongly restrict party power and should, therefore, influence access to power. To my knowledge, the relation of federal democracy and the winner-loser gap has not been assessed.

Besides that, my argument might be applicable to explain other procedural preferences than direct-democratic ones, as at its core, it's not about direct democracy but rather the strategic incentive to either conserve status quo or promote institutional change away from the system that leaves oneself with little political influence.<sup>19</sup> With that in mind, it would be interesting to test my propositions in countries where representation is not the norm or where substantial shares of policymaking are products of participatory processes. Two papers point to the direction that these considerations hold some value. Firstly, Donovan & Karp (2006) observe direct-democratic preferences to be conversely related to dissatisfaction in Switzerland in comparison to systems that rely more on representation. Secondly, Bengtsson & Mattila (2009) report that Finnish citizens who oppose representative democracy do not seem to care much whether institutional change goes in the direction of expanded participation or technocracy.

Lastly, and very generally, it would be desirable if more scholars investigated the questions this paper revolved around with a qualitative methodological approach. During my research, I noticed that the majority of studies is based on survey data. In fact, I could not find a single one that employed qualitative methods, to explore, for instance, 'what do citizens really mean when they say they want direct democracy?'

## **6.2 Contribution**

In the chapter on the research gap, I argued that the current literature on the winner-loser gap as well as strategic support for direct democracy is theoretically underdeveloped. Ideas of what self-interested citizen support for direct democracy is, what it has to do with parties and power, and the underlying assumptions of such considerations had largely been worked out isolated and did not form a comprehensive argumentative framework. Consequently, research did not have a sophisticated understanding of the scope of what constitutes winning and losing in electoral systems and how it might shape self-interested preferences alignments. The legislative arena had, for instance, never been considered as important concerning said question. I concluded that a more coherent theory was needed to produce more complete empirical results.

With regards to these aspects, I think of the contribution of this paper as twofold. To begin with, on the conceptual and causal level it compiles loose ends and adds new building blocks, especially with the access to power considerations and the power integration framework. In turn, it makes steps into the general direction of a more comprehensive theoretical approach to

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<sup>19</sup> In this sense, my argument can also be read as a contribution to the literature on 'process preferences' in general (see footnote 5).

the understanding of strategically aligned procedural preferences, primarily direct-democratic ones. And moreover, on the empirical level, the evidence from the statistical analysis leads to new insights on winner-loser effects in representative systems as well as the range of self-interested procedural preferences. Central to this is that, to my knowledge, this study is the first to test the predictive value of (time-dependent) government-opposition measures for referendum approval in a broad cross-national analysis. Previous studies had only tested these measures for a small number of countries or not specifically in relation to referendum support. In addition, this is the first time that the legislative arena and the distinction between challenger and mainstream party voters are considered as important winner-loser measures that are potentially influential with regards to self-interested referendum endorsement.

My results call into question the external validity of previous studies that concluded that there is a significant difference between the preferences of supporters of the governing and (long-term) opposition parties. In contrast, the findings here suggest that the winner-loser gap lies rather between the voters of challenger and those of established parties, which sheds new light on previous research. Furthermore, it is shown for the first time that differences in legislative power do not inform subjective perceptions of the winner-loser status that matter in relation to referendum approval.

From a broader perspective, these results present indications that self-interested preference formations are less pronounced among citizens than expected. Ideology and dissatisfaction seem to play the more important roles. However, as outlined, this study relies on assumptions that must be assessed for their validity and applicability in the future. In this respect, statements about the significance of strategy and self-interest in relation to ideological explanations of direct-democratic preferences can only be made with reservations.

## 7 Conclusion

Direct democracy and its instruments, such as referendums, initiatives, and citizen councils, have gained importance in recent years – also as a consequence of contemporary democracy’s issues with political discontentment and declining trust in its institutions and representatives. However, our understanding of the reasons for which people approve of direct democracy, is still blurred. Solving this fundamental puzzle is not only interesting from an academic point of view but also touches upon to the ‘crisis of [representative] democracy’ itself, as it helps us understand whether more participatory modes of government are a “panacea” (Engler et al. forthcoming: 2) against antidemocratic forces or play their cards.

The research that explores the sources of direct-democratic endorsement has revolved around two distinct motives for human behavior: ideology and strategy. In line with recent studies that highlighted the importance of the latter more strongly, this paper sought to contribute to the overarching question: How valid is the view that citizen support for direct-democratic means of government is based on self-interest?

I put forward an argument in line with the premise of a strategically acting and informed public, and specifically highlighted the special role that parties, as intermediary organizations, play in shaping their voters' self-interest. On that note, a theoretical framework was introduced that specified varying degrees of being a political winner or loser and recognized a party's influence within the political arena to be determinant of its supporter's status in said spectrum. Individuals that support less established parties were seen as electoral losers that cannot expect the policy process to produce outputs in line with their interest, whereas those that vote for more successful parties were conceptualized as having substantial access to power, leading them to anticipate policymaking as responsive to them. Consequentially, the latter were hypothesized to be favorable of the status quo of representative procedures, and the former to endorse the increased usage of alternative means of government such as participatory instruments.

To assess the argument, I operationalized the varying degrees of party power or the voters' prospects to be influential, respectively, and evaluated the resulting measures' predictive values for referendum support in a 20-country multivariate linear regression analysis based on the latest data from the European Social Survey.

The empirical results opposed the explanatory value of most of the access to power measures, but simultaneously, they revealed some evidence for my general argument. There appears to be no evidence for a winner-loser gap in between mainstream party supporters, however, they as a whole, differ in their referendum support from those who have the most reason to be strategically incentivized to favor the introduction of direct-democratic mechanisms: challenger party voters. While the distinction between the two groups of voters indicates that strategic preference alignments exist, my findings overwhelmingly point to a more pronounced importance of ideology in the formation of direct-democratic process preferences.

Yet, this paper is far from giving final answers. Many uncertainties persist, and some new puzzles have emerged. The basic question remains unchanged: *Who supports direct democracy for what reasons?*

## 8 References

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## 9 Appendix

A-Table 1: Wave 10-ESS countries, sample countries, reasons for exclusion

| Country         | Included in sample? | Reason for exclusion   |
|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| Austria         | Yes                 | /  |
| Belgium         | Yes                 | /  |
| Bulgaria        | Yes                 | /  |
| Switzerland     | Yes                 | /  |
| Croatia         | No                  | The ESS summarizes voters of different Croatian parties in one value in the according variable ( <i>prtvbhr</i> ). That makes it impossible to trace the information needed to code the independent variables for Croatia.                                   |
| Cyprus          | Yes                 | /  |
| Czechia         | Yes                 | /  |
| Germany         | No                  | The ESS holds its survey in Germany in the transition phase from old to new government. That implies that the independent variables cannot be coded for Germany.   |
| Estonia         | Yes                 | /  |
| Spain           | Yes                 | /  |
| Finland         | Yes                 | /  |
| France          | Yes                 | /  |
| Hungary         | No                  | I consider countries that score less than 0.6 points on V-Dem's liberal and electoral democracy scale as non-democratic. They are excluded from the sample as the theory behind the empirical analysis only formulates expectations for democratic polities. |
| United Kingdom  | Yes                 | /  |
| Ireland         | Yes                 | /  |
| Iceland         | Yes                 | /  |
| Israel          | No                  | The analysis focuses on Europe. Israel is not a European country.  |
| Italy           | Yes                 | /  |
| Latvia          | Yes                 | /  |
| Lithuania       | Yes                 | /  |
| Netherlands     | Yes                 | /  |
| Norway          | No                  | The ESS held its survey in Norway before the 2021 elections, during the transition phase and after the new cabinet took office, which implies that the independent variables cannot be coded for Norway.   |
| Poland          | No                  | See Hungary  |
| Portugal        | Yes                 | /  |
| Sweden          | No                  | The ESS held its survey in Sweden during the transition phase from old to new government. That implies that the independent variables cannot be coded for Sweden.  |
| Slovenia        | No                  | During the ESS survey phase one party leaves the cabinet. That implies that the independent variables cannot be coded for Slovenia.  |
| Slovakia        | Yes                 | /  |
| Serbia          | No                  | See Hungary  |
| Greece          | Yes                 | /  |
| Montenegro      | No                  | See Hungary  |
| North Macedonia | No                  | See Hungary  |

**A-Table 2: (In)dependent variables, control variables, topic, coding, statistical models**

| Variable   | Topic   | Coding   |
|--|---|--|
| Dependent variable: Referendum support                           |   |  |
| <i>votedir</i>   | Attitudes towards the utilization of referendums on policy issues                           | Scale 0-10: higher values indicate higher preference for referendums   |
| Key independent variables A-D: Power Integration/Access to Power |   |  |
| A: <i>vpingov</i>  | Is the party the respondent voted for in government?  | Binary: 0=No; 1=Yes  |
| B: <i>vpseatshare</i>  | What's the parliament seat share of party the respondent voted for?                         | Continuous: "0" to "100"; higher values indicate a higher seat share   |
| C: <i>voutofgov</i>  | How many years has the party the respondent voted for been out of government?               | Discrete: "0" to "41"; higher values indicate more years out of office; challenger party voters excluded   |
| D: <i>vchallngp</i>  | Is the party the respondent voted for a challenger party?                                   | Binary: 0=No; 1=Yes  |
| Model 1 A-D: No controls   |   |  |
| Model 2 A-D: Sociodemographic controls                           |   |  |
| <i>agea</i>  | Age of respondent   | In Years   |
| <i>gndr</i>  | Sex of respondent   | 1=Male, 2=Female   |
| <i>edyrs</i>   | Years of full-time education completed  | In Years   |
| <i>domicil</i>   | Respondent living country- or city-based  | Scale 1-5: higher values indicate country-based living   |
| Model 3 A-D: Socioeconomic control                               |   |  |
| <i>hincfel</i>   | Individual feelings of income status  | Scale 1-4: higher values indicate higher distress  |
| Model 4 A-D: Ideological controls I                              |   |  |
| <i>lrscale</i>   | Self-placement on the left-right scale  | Scale 0-10: from left to right   |
| Model 5 A-D: Ideological controls II                             |   |  |
| <i>imwbent</i>   | Immigration attitudes   | Scale 0-10: higher values indicate more positive evaluations of immigration  |
| <i>grdfinc</i>   | Redistribution attitudes  | Scale 0-10: higher values indicate more positive evaluations of redistribution   |
| <i>wrcmch</i>  | Feelings of distress concerning climate change  | Scale 0-5: higher values indicate more distress regarding climate change   |
| Model 6 & 7 A-D: Trust and satisfaction controls                 |   |  |
| <i>stfдем</i>  | Respondents' satisfaction with how democracy works  | Scale 0-10: higher values indicate higher satisfaction   |
| <i>ppltrst</i>   | Respondents general trust in other people   | Scale 0-10: higher values indicate higher trust  |
| <i>trstpol</i>   | Respondents general trust in national and european political institutions                   | Scale 0-10: higher values indicate higher trust; coded as an index variable of <i>trstprl</i> , <i>trstplt</i> , <i>trstprt</i> , <i>trstlgl</i> and <i>trstep</i> |
| Model 8 A-D: Ideological controls III                            |   |  |
| <i>viepol</i>  | Attitudes concerning the desired political power of 'ordinary people' in contrast to elites | Scale 0-10: higher values indicating the preference for more 'people-power'  |

**A-Table 3: Pairwise correlations of ind. var. and ideology controls; multicollinearity test**

| Variable                 | <i>vpingov</i> | <i>vpseatshare</i> | <i>voutofgov</i> | <i>vchallngp</i> |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Left-right scale         | -0.005         | 0.140              | -0.018           | -0.041           |
| Immigration attitudes    | 0.055          | -0.074             | 0.045            | -0.024           |
| Redistribution attitudes | -0.018         | -0.005             | 0.035            | 0.011            |
| Climate change distress  | 0.025          | -0.032             | 0.025            | -0.004           |
| People-centrism          | -0.063         | 0.009              | 0.050            | 0.046            |

**A-Table 4: Summary statistics of dependent and independent variables; all respondents**

| Variable  | Obs.  | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min | Max  |
|---|-------|--------|-----------|-----|------|
| Dep. var.                                       |       |        |           |     |      |
| Referendum support ( <i>votedir</i> )           | 34068 | 7.958  | 7.958     | 0   | 10   |
| Ind. var.                                       |       |        |           |     |      |
| A: Government party ( <i>vpingov</i> )          | 20608 | .509   | .5        | 0   | 1    |
| B: Parliament seat share ( <i>vpseatshare</i> ) | 20540 | 19.887 | 14.352    | 0   | 55.5 |
| C: Years out of government ( <i>voutofgov</i> ) | 15776 | 1.275  | 2.636     | 0   | 41   |
| D: Challenger party ( <i>vchallngp</i> )        | 20267 | .222   | .415      | 0   | 1    |

**A-Table 5: Summary statistics of dependent variable; samples as in the regression analysis**

| Dep. var. <i>votedir</i>                          | Obs    | Mean     | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|--------|----------|-----------|-----|-----|
| Referendum support for <i>vpingov</i> -sample     | 20322  | 7.929    | 2.148     | 0   | 10  |
| Referendum support for <i>vpseatshare</i> -sample | 20,257 | 7.928864 | 2.148037  | 0   | 10  |
| Referendum support for <i>voutofgov</i> -sample   | 15559  | 7.873707 | 2.142093  | 0   | 10  |
| Referendum support for <i>vchallngp</i> -sample   | 19,990 | 7.924962 | 2.147139  | 0   | 10  |

**A-Table 6: Summary statistics of control variables; full sample**

| Variable                 | Obs.  | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|--------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-----|-----|
| Age                      | 34601 | 50.929 | 18.312    | 15  | 90  |
| Sex                      | 34906 | 1.534  | .499      | 1   | 2   |
| Education                | 33788 | 13.227 | 4.389     | 0   | 65  |
| Domicile                 | 34794 | 2.832  | 1.226     | 1   | 5   |
| Economic distress        | 34247 | 2.003  | .858      | 1   | 4   |
| Left-right scale         | 30959 | 5.135  | 2.334     | 0   | 10  |
| Immigration attitudes    | 33959 | 5.166  | 2.464     | 0   | 10  |
| Redistribution attitudes | 34345 | 7.922  | 2.23      | 0   | 10  |
| Climate change distress  | 34333 | 3.247  | .948      | 1   | 5   |
| Satisfaction with dem.   | 34252 | 5.298  | 2.566     | 0   | 10  |
| General trust            | 34896 | 4.932  | 2.555     | 0   | 10  |
| Political trust          | 32629 | 4.289  | 2.172     | 0   | 10  |
| People-centrism          | 33677 | 7.529  | 2.201     | 0   | 10  |

**A-Table 7: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. A; including fixed effects**

|                             | Dep. var.: Referendum support |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                             | (1)                           | (2)       | (3)       | (4)       | (5)       | (6)       | (7)       | (8)       |
| <b>Ind. var. A:</b>         | 0.146***                      | -0.179*** | -0.165*** | -0.157*** | -0.166*** | -0.133*** | -0.111*** | -0.0684*  |
| <i>vpingov</i>              | (-4.74)                       | (-5.72)   | (-5.27)   | (-4.90)   | (-5.32)   | (-4.15)   | (-3.40)   | (-2.20)   |
| Age                         |                               | 0.00279** | 0.00265** | 0.00259** | 0.000149  | 0.000436  | 0.000619  | 0.00105   |
|                             |                               | (2.99)    | (2.83)    | (2.71)    | (0.16)    | (0.46)    | (0.65)    | (1.15)    |
| Sex                         |                               | 0.189***  | 0.177***  | 0.173***  | 0.0792**  | 0.0757*   | 0.0756*   | 0.0571    |
|                             |                               | (6.34)    | (5.89)    | (5.66)    | (2.63)    | (2.51)    | (2.48)    | (1.96)    |
| Education                   |                               | 0.0222*** | 0.0166*** | 0.0179*** | 0.0143*** | 0.0147*** | 0.0132*** | -0.0102** |
|                             |                               | (-5.98)   | (-4.36)   | (-4.63)   | (-3.74)   | (-3.85)   | (-3.38)   | (-2.74)   |
| Domicile                    |                               | 0.0501*** | 0.0478*** | 0.0526*** | 0.0501*** | 0.0496*** | 0.0522*** | 0.0471*** |
|                             |                               | (3.97)    | (3.77)    | (4.08)    | (3.97)    | (3.93)    | (4.08)    | (3.86)    |
| Income distress             |                               |           | 0.145***  | 0.147***  | 0.0742*** | 0.0624**  | 0.0475*   | 0.0323    |
|                             |                               |           | (7.07)    | (6.99)    | (3.57)    | (2.98)    | (2.23)    | (1.58)    |
| Lr-scale                    |                               |           |           | -0.00558  | 0.0375*** | 0.0411*** | 0.0429*** | 0.0339*** |
|                             |                               |           |           | (-0.88)   | (5.90)    | (6.41)    | (6.58)    | (5.45)    |
| Immigration attitudes       |                               |           |           |           | -0.0123   | -0.00518  | 0.00584   | 0.00349   |
|                             |                               |           |           |           | (-1.78)   | (-0.73)   | (0.79)    | (0.49)    |
| Redistribution attitudes    |                               |           |           |           | 0.280***  | 0.279***  | 0.280***  | 0.151***  |
|                             |                               |           |           |           | (38.87)   | (38.71)   | (38.43)   | (19.89)   |
| Climate change distress     |                               |           |           |           | 0.0167    | 0.0199    | 0.0167    | 0.0242    |
|                             |                               |           |           |           | (0.99)    | (1.18)    | (0.97)    | (1.48)    |
| Satisfaction with democracy |                               |           |           |           |           | 0.0342*** | -0.00461  | 0.00333   |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           | (-4.91)   | (-0.56)   | (0.42)    |
| Political trust             |                               |           |           |           |           |           | 0.0775*** | 0.0509*** |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           |           | (-7.61)   | (-5.21)   |
| General trust               |                               |           |           |           |           |           | 0.00496   | 0.00132   |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           |           | (0.70)    | (0.20)    |
| People-centrism             |                               |           |           |           |           |           |           | 0.315***  |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           |           |           | (42.58)   |
| _cons                       | 8.161***                      | 7.902***  | 7.616***  | 7.648***  | 5.713***  | 5.849***  | 5.920***  | 4.675***  |
|                             | (140.59)                      | (67.66)   | (61.71)   | (58.86)   | (38.89)   | (39.11)   | (38.79)   | (31.48)   |
| <i>N</i>                    | 20322                         | 19672     | 19509     | 18822     | 18212     | 18150     | 17504     | 17318     |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**A-Table 8: Jackknife multivariate linear regression of ind. var. A; including fixed effects**

|                             | Dep. var.: Referendum support |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                             | (1)                           | (2)       | (3)       | (4)       | (5)       | (6)       | (7)       | (8)       |
| <b>Ind. var. A:</b>         | 0.146***                      | -0.179*** | -0.165*** | -0.157*** | -0.166*** | -0.133*** | -0.111*** | -0.0684*  |
| <i>vpingov</i>              | (-4.72)                       | (-5.69)   | (-5.24)   | (-4.88)   | (-5.28)   | (-4.11)   | (-3.38)   | (-2.19)   |
| Age                         |                               | 0.00279** | 0.00265** | 0.00259** | 0.000149  | 0.000436  | 0.000619  | 0.00105   |
|                             |                               | (2.98)    | (2.82)    | (2.70)    | (0.16)    | (0.46)    | (0.65)    | (1.15)    |
| Sex                         |                               | 0.189***  | 0.177***  | 0.173***  | 0.0792**  | 0.0757*   | 0.0756*   | 0.0571*   |
|                             |                               | (6.32)    | (5.86)    | (5.64)    | (2.63)    | (2.51)    | (2.48)    | (1.96)    |
| Education                   |                               | 0.0222*** | 0.0166*** | 0.0179*** | 0.0143*** | 0.0147*** | -0.0132** | -0.0102** |
|                             |                               | (-5.73)   | (-4.16)   | (-4.40)   | (-3.55)   | (-3.65)   | (-3.27)   | (-2.65)   |
| Domicile                    |                               | 0.0501*** | 0.0478*** | 0.0526*** | 0.0501*** | 0.0496*** | 0.0522*** | 0.0471*** |
|                             |                               | (3.92)    | (3.73)    | (4.03)    | (3.93)    | (3.89)    | (4.04)    | (3.79)    |
| Income distress             |                               |           | 0.145***  | 0.147***  | 0.0742*** | 0.0624**  | 0.0475*   | 0.0323    |
|                             |                               |           | (6.94)    | (6.89)    | (3.54)    | (2.96)    | (2.21)    | (1.58)    |
| Lr-scale                    |                               |           |           | -0.00558  | 0.0375*** | 0.0411*** | 0.0429*** | 0.0339*** |
|                             |                               |           |           | (-0.84)   | (5.67)    | (6.14)    | (6.30)    | (5.22)    |
| Immigration attitudes       |                               |           |           |           | -0.0123   | -0.00518  | 0.00584   | 0.00349   |
|                             |                               |           |           |           | (-1.69)   | (-0.69)   | (0.74)    | (0.46)    |
| Redistribution attitudes    |                               |           |           |           | 0.280***  | 0.279***  | 0.280***  | 0.151***  |
|                             |                               |           |           |           | (30.88)   | (30.77)   | (30.62)   | (15.80)   |
| Climate change distress     |                               |           |           |           | 0.0167    | 0.0199    | 0.0167    | 0.0242    |
|                             |                               |           |           |           | (0.92)    | (1.10)    | (0.91)    | (1.38)    |
| Satisfaction with democracy |                               |           |           |           |           | 0.0342*** | -0.00461  | 0.00333   |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           | (-4.54)   | (-0.52)   | (0.40)    |
| Political trust             |                               |           |           |           |           |           | 0.0775*** | 0.0509*** |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           |           | (-7.15)   | (-4.93)   |
| General trust               |                               |           |           |           |           |           | 0.00496   | 0.00132   |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           |           | (0.68)    | (0.19)    |
| People-centrism             |                               |           |           |           |           |           |           | 0.315***  |
|                             |                               |           |           |           |           |           |           | (33.36)   |
| _cons                       | 8.161***                      | 7.902***  | 7.616***  | 7.648***  | 5.713***  | 5.849***  | 5.920***  | 4.675***  |
|                             | (133.80)                      | (65.40)   | (59.15)   | (56.49)   | (35.58)   | (35.78)   | (35.54)   | (28.60)   |
| <i>N</i>                    | 20322                         | 19672     | 19509     | 18822     | 18212     | 18150     | 17504     | 17318     |

Standard Errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**A-Table 9: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. B; including fixed effects**

|                             | Dep. var.: Referendum support |            |            |            |            |           |           |           |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                             | (1)                           | (2)        | (3)        | (4)        | (5)        | (6)       | (7)       | (8)       |
| <b>Ind. var. B:</b>         | 0.00394***                    | 0.00493*** | 0.00458*** | 0.00495*** | -0.00352** | -0.00232  | -0.00167  | 0.000460  |
| <i>vpseatshare</i>          | (-3.37)                       | (-4.15)    | (-3.84)    | (-4.00)    | (-2.92)    | (-1.89)   | (-1.34)   | (-0.39)   |
| Age                         |                               | 0.00266**  | 0.00253**  | 0.00250**  | 0.0000382  | 0.000300  | 0.000486  | 0.000955  |
|                             |                               | (2.85)     | (2.70)     | (2.62)     | (-0.04)    | (0.32)    | (0.51)    | (1.04)    |
| Sex                         |                               | 0.182***   | 0.170***   | 0.168***   | 0.0730*    | 0.0701*   | 0.0701*   | 0.0524    |
|                             |                               | (6.10)     | (5.64)     | (5.46)     | (2.42)     | (2.33)    | (2.29)    | (1.80)    |
| Education                   |                               | -0.0228*** | -0.0170*** | -0.0182*** | -0.0142*** | 0.0145*** | 0.0130*** | 0.00980** |
|                             |                               | (-6.12)    | (-4.44)    | (-4.68)    | (-3.70)    | (-3.78)   | (-3.32)   | (-2.63)   |
| Domicile                    |                               | 0.0504***  | 0.0481***  | 0.0528***  | 0.0497***  | 0.0489*** | 0.0516*** | 0.0467*** |
|                             |                               | (3.99)     | (3.78)     | (4.08)     | (3.94)     | (3.87)    | (4.02)    | (3.82)    |
| Income distress             |                               |            | 0.150***   | 0.152***   | 0.0795***  | 0.0656**  | 0.0505*   | 0.0352    |
|                             |                               |            | (7.27)     | (7.20)     | (3.82)     | (3.12)    | (2.36)    | (1.72)    |
| Lr-scale                    |                               |            |            | -0.00106   | 0.0406***  | 0.0437*** | 0.0449*** | 0.0349*** |
|                             |                               |            |            | (-0.16)    | (6.29)     | (6.72)    | (6.81)    | (5.54)    |
| Immigration attitudes       |                               |            |            |            | -0.0141*   | -0.00548  | 0.00597   | 0.00388   |
|                             |                               |            |            |            | (-2.04)    | (-0.77)   | (0.80)    | (0.55)    |
| Redistribution attitudes    |                               |            |            |            | 0.279***   | 0.278***  | 0.280***  | 0.151***  |
|                             |                               |            |            |            | (38.75)    | (38.58)   | (38.32)   | (19.81)   |
| Climate change distress     |                               |            |            |            | 0.0164     | 0.0203    | 0.0176    | 0.0258    |
|                             |                               |            |            |            | (0.97)     | (1.20)    | (1.02)    | (1.57)    |
| Satisfaction with democracy |                               |            |            |            |            | 0.0382*** | -0.00744  | 0.000992  |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            | (-5.49)   | (-0.90)   | (0.13)    |
| Political trust             |                               |            |            |            |            |           | 0.0797*** | 0.0526*** |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            |           | (-7.81)   | (-5.38)   |
| General trust               |                               |            |            |            |            |           | 0.00570   | 0.00208   |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            |           | (0.81)    | (0.31)    |
| People-centrism             |                               |            |            |            |            |           |           | 0.316***  |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            |           |           | (42.61)   |
| _cons                       | 8.172***                      | 7.942***   | 7.644***   | 7.665***   | 5.709***   | 5.851***  | 5.916***  | 4.653***  |
|                             | (131.78)                      | (66.31)    | (60.48)    | (58.22)    | (38.26)    | (38.65)   | (38.30)   | (30.96)   |
| <i>N</i>                    | 20257                         | 19609      | 19446      | 18762      | 18152      | 18092     | 17447     | 17263     |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**A-Table 10: Jackknife multivariate linear regression of ind. var. B; including fixed effects**

|                             | Dep. var.: Referendum support |            |            |            |            |           |           |           |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                             | (1)                           | (2)        | (3)        | (4)        | (5)        | (6)       | (7)       | (8)       |
| <b>Ind. Var. B:</b>         | 0.00394***                    | 0.00493*** | 0.00458*** | 0.00495*** | -0.00352** | -0.00232  | -0.00167  | 0.000460  |
| <i>vpseatshare</i>          | (-3.34)                       | (-4.11)    | (-3.81)    | (-3.98)    | (-2.91)    | (-1.87)   | (-1.33)   | (-0.39)   |
| Age                         |                               | 0.00266**  | 0.00253**  | 0.00250**  | 0.0000382  | 0.000300  | 0.000486  | 0.000955  |
|                             |                               | (2.84)     | (2.70)     | (2.61)     | (-0.04)    | (0.32)    | (0.51)    | (1.04)    |
| Sex                         |                               | 0.182***   | 0.170***   | 0.168***   | 0.0730*    | 0.0701*   | 0.0701*   | 0.0524    |
|                             |                               | (6.08)     | (5.63)     | (5.45)     | (2.42)     | (2.32)    | (2.29)    | (1.80)    |
| Education                   |                               | -0.0228*** | -0.0170*** | -0.0182*** | -0.0142*** | 0.0145*** | -0.0130** | 0.00980*  |
|                             |                               | (-5.87)    | (-4.24)    | (-4.46)    | (-3.52)    | (-3.59)   | (-3.21)   | (-2.54)   |
| Domicile                    |                               | 0.0504***  | 0.0481***  | 0.0528***  | 0.0497***  | 0.0489*** | 0.0516*** | 0.0467*** |
|                             |                               | (3.94)     | (3.74)     | (4.04)     | (3.89)     | (3.82)    | (3.98)    | (3.76)    |
| Income distress             |                               |            | 0.150***   | 0.152***   | 0.0795***  | 0.0656**  | 0.0505*   | 0.0352    |
|                             |                               |            | (7.13)     | (7.09)     | (3.79)     | (3.10)    | (2.35)    | (1.71)    |
| Lr-scale                    |                               |            |            | -0.00106   | 0.0406***  | 0.0437*** | 0.0449*** | 0.0349*** |
|                             |                               |            |            | (-0.16)    | (6.03)     | (6.44)    | (6.52)    | (5.30)    |
| Immigration attitudes       |                               |            |            |            | -0.0141    | -0.00548  | 0.00597   | 0.00388   |
|                             |                               |            |            |            | (-1.95)    | (-0.73)   | (0.75)    | (0.51)    |
| Redistribution attitudes    |                               |            |            |            | 0.279***   | 0.278***  | 0.280***  | 0.151***  |
|                             |                               |            |            |            | (30.78)    | (30.67)   | (30.53)   | (15.74)   |
| Climate change distress     |                               |            |            |            | 0.0164     | 0.0203    | 0.0176    | 0.0258    |
|                             |                               |            |            |            | (0.91)     | (1.12)    | (0.95)    | (1.47)    |
| Satisfaction with democracy |                               |            |            |            |            | 0.0382*** | -0.00744  | 0.000992  |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            | (-5.07)   | (-0.84)   | (0.12)    |
| Political trust             |                               |            |            |            |            |           | 0.0797*** | 0.0526*** |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            |           | (-7.32)   | (-5.08)   |
| General trust               |                               |            |            |            |            |           | 0.00570   | 0.00208   |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            |           | (0.77)    | (0.30)    |
| People-centrism             |                               |            |            |            |            |           |           | 0.316***  |
|                             |                               |            |            |            |            |           |           | (33.38)   |
| _cons                       | 8.172***                      | 7.942***   | 7.644***   | 7.665***   | 5.709***   | 5.851***  | 5.916***  | 4.653***  |
|                             | (125.47)                      | (64.18)    | (58.02)    | (55.89)    | (35.12)    | (35.48)   | (35.21)   | (28.26)   |
| <i>N</i>                    | 20257                         | 19609      | 19446      | 18762      | 18152      | 18092     | 17447     | 17263     |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**A-Table 11: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. C; including fixed effects**

|  | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|  | (1)                           | (2)                  | (3)                  | (4)                  | (5)                  | (6)                  | (7)                  | (8)                  |
| <b>Ind. Var C:</b><br><i>voutofgov</i> | 0.0110<br>(1.54)              | 0.0155*<br>(2.16)    | 0.0130<br>(1.81)     | 0.0123<br>(1.68)     | 0.00678<br>(0.95)    | 0.00529<br>(0.73)    | 0.00503<br>(0.69)    | 0.000982<br>(0.14)   |
| Age                                    |                               | 0.00302**<br>(2.84)  | 0.00291**<br>(2.73)  | 0.00283**<br>(2.60)  | 0.000350<br>(0.33)   | 0.000425<br>(0.40)   | 0.000358<br>(0.33)   | 0.000683<br>(0.65)   |
| Sex                                    |                               | 0.223***<br>(6.56)   | 0.213***<br>(6.24)   | 0.210***<br>(6.05)   | 0.105**<br>(3.09)    | 0.105**<br>(3.07)    | 0.108**<br>(3.12)    | 0.0871**<br>(2.63)   |
| Education                              |                               | 0.0204***<br>(-4.79) | 0.0150***<br>(-3.44) | 0.0170***<br>(-3.84) | 0.0157***<br>(-3.58) | 0.0158***<br>(-3.61) | 0.0147***<br>(-3.31) | -0.0121**<br>(-2.82) |
| Domicile                               |                               | 0.0552***<br>(3.84)  | 0.0530***<br>(3.67)  | 0.0586***<br>(4.00)  | 0.0529***<br>(3.69)  | 0.0529***<br>(3.69)  | 0.0535***<br>(3.69)  | 0.0511***<br>(3.68)  |
| Income distress                        |                               |                      | 0.136***<br>(5.69)   | 0.138***<br>(5.66)   | 0.0752**<br>(3.12)   | 0.0720**<br>(2.96)   | 0.0585*<br>(2.37)    | 0.0340<br>(1.43)     |
| Lr-scale                               |                               |                      |                      | -0.00715<br>(-1.00)  | 0.0367***<br>(5.10)  | 0.0380***<br>(5.21)  | 0.0408***<br>(5.52)  | 0.0321***<br>(4.53)  |
| Immigration attitudes                  |                               |                      |                      |                      | -0.00577<br>(-0.73)  | -0.00336<br>(-0.41)  | 0.0103<br>(1.20)     | 0.00795<br>(0.97)    |
| Redistribution attitudes               |                               |                      |                      |                      | 0.279***<br>(33.95)  | 0.278***<br>(33.81)  | 0.281***<br>(33.64)  | 0.157***<br>(18.05)  |
| Climate change distress                |                               |                      |                      |                      | 0.0294<br>(1.52)     | 0.0313<br>(1.61)     | 0.0274<br>(1.39)     | 0.0324<br>(1.71)     |
| Satisfaction with democracy            |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      | -0.0126<br>(-1.56)   | 0.0188*<br>(1.98)    | 0.0218*<br>(2.39)    |
| Political trust                        |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.0808***<br>(-6.92) | 0.0583***<br>(-5.18) |
| General trust                          |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.00286<br>(0.36)    | 0.000805<br>(0.10)   |
| People-centrism                        |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.301***<br>(35.78)  |
| _cons                                  | 8.078***<br>(135.24)          | 7.686***<br>(58.15)  | 7.421***<br>(53.17)  | 7.468***<br>(51.02)  | 5.504***<br>(33.23)  | 5.564***<br>(32.76)  | 5.666***<br>(32.70)  | 4.557***<br>(26.98)  |
| <i>N</i>                               | 15559                         | 15094                | 14975                | 14499                | 14017                | 13980                | 13481                | 13325                |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**A-Table 12: Jackknife multivariate linear regression of ind. var. C; including fixed effects**

|                             | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                             | (1)                           | (2)                  | (3)                  | (4)                  | (5)                  | (6)                  | (7)                  | (8)                  |
| <b>Ind. Var. C:</b>         | 0.0110                        | 0.0155*              | 0.0130               | 0.0123               | 0.00678              | 0.00529              | 0.00503              | 0.000982             |
| <i>voutofgov</i>            | (1.45)                        | (2.05)               | (1.73)               | (1.61)               | (0.90)               | (0.70)               | (0.66)               | (0.13)               |
| Age                         |                               | 0.00302**<br>(2.81)  | 0.00291**<br>(2.70)  | 0.00283**<br>(2.58)  | 0.000350<br>(0.33)   | 0.000425<br>(0.39)   | 0.000358<br>(0.33)   | 0.000683<br>(0.65)   |
| Sex                         |                               | 0.223***<br>(6.54)   | 0.213***<br>(6.21)   | 0.210***<br>(6.02)   | 0.105**<br>(3.08)    | 0.105**<br>(3.06)    | 0.108**<br>(3.10)    | 0.0871**<br>(2.62)   |
| Education                   |                               | 0.0204***<br>(-4.58) | -0.0150**<br>(-3.28) | 0.0170***<br>(-3.64) | 0.0157***<br>(-3.42) | 0.0158***<br>(-3.45) | -0.0147**<br>(-3.15) | -0.0121**<br>(-2.70) |
| Domicile                    |                               | 0.0552***<br>(3.81)  | 0.0530***<br>(3.65)  | 0.0586***<br>(3.97)  | 0.0529***<br>(3.68)  | 0.0529***<br>(3.68)  | 0.0535***<br>(3.67)  | 0.0511***<br>(3.63)  |
| Income distress             |                               |                      | 0.136***<br>(5.54)   | 0.138***<br>(5.55)   | 0.0752**<br>(3.08)   | 0.0720**<br>(2.92)   | 0.0585*<br>(2.33)    | 0.0340<br>(1.41)     |
| Lr-scale                    |                               |                      |                      | -0.00715<br>(-0.95)  | 0.0367***<br>(4.94)  | 0.0380***<br>(5.05)  | 0.0408***<br>(5.32)  | 0.0321***<br>(4.36)  |
| Immigration attitudes       |                               |                      |                      |                      | -0.00577<br>(-0.69)  | -0.00336<br>(-0.39)  | 0.0103<br>(1.14)     | 0.00795<br>(0.92)    |
| Redistribution attitudes    |                               |                      |                      |                      | 0.279***<br>(27.21)  | 0.278***<br>(27.10)  | 0.281***<br>(27.01)  | 0.157***<br>(14.36)  |
| Climate change distress     |                               |                      |                      |                      | 0.0294<br>(1.40)     | 0.0313<br>(1.49)     | 0.0274<br>(1.28)     | 0.0324<br>(1.58)     |
| Satisfaction with democracy |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      | -0.0126<br>(-1.44)   | 0.0188<br>(1.83)     | 0.0218*<br>(2.22)    |
| Political trust             |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.0808***<br>(-6.45) | 0.0583***<br>(-4.86) |
| General trust               |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.00286<br>(0.34)    | 0.000805<br>(0.10)   |
| People-centrism             |                               |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.301***<br>(28.42)  |
| _cons                       | 8.078***<br>(127.57)          | 7.686***<br>(56.02)  | 7.421***<br>(50.84)  | 7.468***<br>(48.92)  | 5.504***<br>(30.42)  | 5.564***<br>(29.95)  | 5.666***<br>(29.86)  | 4.557***<br>(24.42)  |
| <i>N</i>                    | 15559                         | 15094                | 14975                | 14499                | 14017                | 13980                | 13481                | 13325                |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**A-Table 13: Multivariate linear regression of ind. var. D; including fixed effects**

|                             | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                             | (1)                           | (2)                   | (3)                  | (4)                  | (5)                  | (6)                  | (7)                  | (8)                  |
| <b>Ind. Var. D:</b>         | 0.226***                      | 0.276***              | 0.264***             | 0.246***             | 0.233***             | 0.202***             | 0.169***             | 0.136***             |
| <i>vchallngp</i>            | (6.10)                        | (7.30)                | (6.95)               | (6.33)               | (6.15)               | (5.26)               | (4.31)               | (3.66)               |
| Age                         |                               | 0.00325***<br>(3.45)  | 0.00310**<br>(3.28)  | 0.00303**<br>(3.14)  | 0.000573<br>(0.61)   | 0.000817<br>(0.86)   | 0.000958<br>(0.99)   | 0.00131<br>(1.42)    |
| Sex                         |                               | 0.190***<br>(6.31)    | 0.178***<br>(5.88)   | 0.174***<br>(5.63)   | 0.0781**<br>(2.58)   | 0.0757*<br>(2.50)    | 0.0757*<br>(2.47)    | 0.0564<br>(1.92)     |
| Education                   |                               | -0.0221***<br>(-5.95) | 0.0166***<br>(-4.35) | 0.0181***<br>(-4.64) | 0.0146***<br>(-3.79) | 0.0149***<br>(-3.88) | 0.0135***<br>(-3.46) | -0.0104**<br>(-2.77) |
| Domicile                    |                               | 0.0528***<br>(4.16)   | 0.0505***<br>(3.95)  | 0.0549***<br>(4.22)  | 0.0527***<br>(4.15)  | 0.0517***<br>(4.06)  | 0.0540***<br>(4.19)  | 0.0498***<br>(4.05)  |
| Income distress             |                               |                       | 0.144***<br>(6.99)   | 0.145***<br>(6.87)   | 0.0755***<br>(3.61)  | 0.0629**<br>(2.98)   | 0.0486*<br>(2.27)    | 0.0327<br>(1.59)     |
| Lr-scale                    |                               |                       |                      | -0.00543<br>(-0.85)  | 0.0375***<br>(5.88)  | 0.0411***<br>(6.38)  | 0.0427***<br>(6.53)  | 0.0333***<br>(5.33)  |
| Immigration attitudes       |                               |                       |                      |                      | -0.0103<br>(-1.47)   | -0.00310<br>(-0.43)  | 0.00760<br>(1.02)    | 0.00451<br>(0.63)    |
| Redistribution attitudes    |                               |                       |                      |                      | 0.278***<br>(38.26)  | 0.277***<br>(38.09)  | 0.278***<br>(37.80)  | 0.149***<br>(19.43)  |
| Climate change distress     |                               |                       |                      |                      | 0.0173<br>(1.02)     | 0.0202<br>(1.18)     | 0.0170<br>(0.99)     | 0.0237<br>(1.44)     |
| Satisfaction with democracy |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      | 0.0344***<br>(-4.94) | -0.00556<br>(-0.68)  | 0.00314<br>(0.40)    |
| Political trust             |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.0760***<br>(-7.40) | 0.0500***<br>(-5.08) |
| General trust               |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.00552<br>(0.78)    | 0.00193<br>(0.28)    |
| People-centrism             |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.316***<br>(42.32)  |
| _cons                       | 8.060***<br>(142.19)          | 7.747***<br>(65.73)   | 7.472***<br>(60.23)  | 7.510***<br>(57.48)  | 5.573***<br>(37.60)  | 5.739***<br>(37.77)  | 5.828***<br>(37.60)  | 4.626***<br>(30.71)  |
| <i>N</i>                    | 19990                         | 19359                 | 19199                | 18536                | 17943                | 17884                | 17244                | 17060                |

Standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**A-Table 14: Jackknife multivariate linear regression of ind. var. D; including fixed effects**

|                             | Dep. var.: Referendum support |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                             | (1)                           | (2)                   | (3)                  | (4)                  | (5)                  | (6)                  | (7)                  | (8)                  |
| <b>Ind. var. D:</b>         | 0.226***                      | 0.276***              | 0.264***             | 0.246***             | 0.233***             | 0.202***             | 0.169***             | 0.136***             |
| <i>vchallngp</i>            | (6.07)                        | (7.30)                | (6.95)               | (6.30)               | (6.10)               | (5.21)               | (4.29)               | (3.66)               |
| Age                         |                               | 0.00325***<br>(3.44)  | 0.00310**<br>(3.27)  | 0.00303**<br>(3.13)  | 0.000573<br>(0.60)   | 0.000817<br>(0.86)   | 0.000958<br>(0.99)   | 0.00131<br>(1.42)    |
| Sex                         |                               | 0.190***<br>(6.29)    | 0.178***<br>(5.86)   | 0.174***<br>(5.61)   | 0.0781**<br>(2.58)   | 0.0757*<br>(2.49)    | 0.0757*<br>(2.46)    | 0.0564<br>(1.93)     |
| Education                   |                               | -0.0221***<br>(-5.69) | 0.0166***<br>(-4.15) | 0.0181***<br>(-4.41) | 0.0146***<br>(-3.60) | 0.0149***<br>(-3.68) | 0.0135***<br>(-3.34) | -0.0104**<br>(-2.68) |
| Domicile                    |                               | 0.0528***<br>(4.11)   | 0.0505***<br>(3.91)  | 0.0549***<br>(4.18)  | 0.0527***<br>(4.10)  | 0.0517***<br>(4.02)  | 0.0540***<br>(4.15)  | 0.0498***<br>(3.99)  |
| Income distress             |                               |                       | 0.144***<br>(6.86)   | 0.145***<br>(6.76)   | 0.0755***<br>(3.59)  | 0.0629**<br>(2.96)   | 0.0486*<br>(2.25)    | 0.0327<br>(1.58)     |
| Lr-scale                    |                               |                       |                      | -0.00543<br>(-0.82)  | 0.0375***<br>(5.65)  | 0.0411***<br>(6.10)  | 0.0427***<br>(6.25)  | 0.0333***<br>(5.09)  |
| Immigration attitudes       |                               |                       |                      |                      | -0.0103<br>(-1.41)   | -0.00310<br>(-0.41)  | 0.00760<br>(0.95)    | 0.00451<br>(0.59)    |
| Redistribution attitudes    |                               |                       |                      |                      | 0.278***<br>(30.48)  | 0.277***<br>(30.38)  | 0.278***<br>(30.21)  | 0.149***<br>(15.44)  |
| Climate change distress     |                               |                       |                      |                      | 0.0173<br>(0.94)     | 0.0202<br>(1.10)     | 0.0170<br>(0.92)     | 0.0237<br>(1.34)     |
| Satisfaction with democracy |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      | 0.0344***<br>(-4.58) | -0.00556<br>(-0.63)  | 0.00314<br>(0.37)    |
| Political trust             |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.0760***<br>(-6.95) | 0.0500***<br>(-4.80) |
| General trust               |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.00552<br>(0.75)    | 0.00193<br>(0.28)    |
| People-centrism             |                               |                       |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.316***<br>(33.12)  |
| _cons                       | 8.060***<br>(134.59)          | 7.747***<br>(63.56)   | 7.472***<br>(57.79)  | 7.510***<br>(55.24)  | 5.573***<br>(34.41)  | 5.739***<br>(34.61)  | 5.828***<br>(34.54)  | 4.626***<br>(27.97)  |
| <i>N</i>                    | 19990                         | 19359                 | 19199                | 18536                | 17943                | 17884                | 17244                | 17060                |

Standard errors in parentheses; \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001