Explaining Parliamentarians’ Support for Direct and Deliberative Democracy in Europe

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Abstract
Citizens across Western democracies have become increasingly critical towards representative democracy and its institutions. Direct and deliberative procedures are presented as a potential solution to the gap between elites and citizens. Much research has been devoted to the functioning of these alternatives to traditional representative democracy and on the public engagement with them, but, crucially, the politicians’ perspectives have been broadly ignored. This paper fills this gap through an analysis of parliamentarians’ support for referendums and deliberative debates. It uses individual level data from the PartiRep Comparative MP Survey in 14 European countries to identify individual-level determinants of legislators’ support for each of these forms. The findings reveal distinct explanatory factors of support for the two forms. This brings crucial implications in terms of public policy-making, since the type of innovations implemented seems to depend on the type and profile of elected representatives.
Introduction

The dissatisfaction and lower engagement of citizens with representative democracy has been often approached in the literature from the perspective of alternative models of democracy. These models include direct and deliberative democracy, each of them addressing particular problems of the representative model. Direct democracy has been promoted as a mechanism through which citizens get a direct say in the policy-making process, bypassing the representative institutions that they distrust and blame for inefficiency and corruption. It empowers the people by allowing them to engage beyond their vote for representatives and by providing a tool for vertical accountability between elections (Hüller 2010; Altman 2011; Gherghina 2017). Deliberative democracy is oriented towards increasing the quality of decisions, understanding the process and educating citizenry. It involves citizens at crucial stages of the policy-making process, it places emphasis on discussing an issue and aims to include the voices of multiple segments in society (Fishkin 2011; Michels 2011; LeDuc 2015). Both alternative models are complementary to representative democracy, trying to compensate for perceived shortcomings in the traditional representational processes and gap between citizens and political institutions, rather than aiming to bolster and support the mechanisms of representation.

In the attempt to cover these alternative models of democracy, research developed in two major directions. On the one hand, earlier studies focused on the adoption of rules and regulations related to both direct and deliberative democracy, the functioning of the two distinct models, the ways in which existing political institutions accommodate them, and the consequences of using direct and deliberative democracy for the political system and society at large (Mendelsohn & Parkin 2001; Scarrow 2001; Luskin et al. 2002; LeDuc 2003; Gutmann & Thompson 2004; Smith 2009; Fishkin 2011; Farrell et al. 2013; Geissel & Michels 2018). One of the general conclusions reached by this body of literature is that both alternative models of democracy are used increasingly throughout the world over the last decades (Gronlund et al. 2014; Qvortrup 2014). On the other hand, much research has been devoted to citizens’ attitudes towards these models with particular attention paid to their demands, attitudes or general willingness to participate (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002; Anderson & Goodyear-Grant 2010; Webb 2013; Bengtsson & Christensen 2016; Jacquet & Reuchamps 2016; Jacquet 2017; Gherghina & Geissel 2017; 2018). However, we know little about how elected politicians perceive these alternative models. This issue is crucial since
the politicians are in many cases the main drivers of reforms, those who decide whether these models are adopted and implemented. At the same time, the complexity of political alternatives pushes citizens to use cognitive shortcuts (heuristics) in casting their vote. The way in which people vote depends on the information environment during the campaign and this information comes from politicians (de Vreese & Semetko 2004; Hobolt 2007).

This paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature and analyzes parliamentarians’ support for referendums and deliberative debates in Europe. To achieve this goal, it uses individual level data from the PartiRep Comparative MP Survey (conducted in 2009-2012) that includes 944 national legislators from 14 countries. Our statistical analysis aims to identify the explanatory power of satisfaction with legislative work, resentment towards the current system, and the style and focus of representation. We control for age, gender, and left-right self-placement. The findings reveal distinct explanatory factors of support for the two forms. This brings crucial implications in terms of public policy-making, since the type of alternative models implemented seems to depend on the type and profile of elected representatives.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the literature on attitudes towards direct and deliberative democracy and formulates several testable hypotheses. Next, we describe the data, variable measurement and methods used in the analysis. The third section includes the empirical analysis and interpretation of results. The conclusions highlight the key findings of the paper, reflect on the major implications for the broader field of direct and deliberative democracy and discuss avenues for further research.

Drivers of support
Relatively limited attention has been paid so far to the attitudes of politicians towards reforms designed to enable and expand the opportunities for citizens to get involved directly in the policy-making processes. This section reviews the scarce literature on the topic, usually referring to political participation in a broader sense. The two alternative models of democracy entail specific forms of participation. One strand of research that deserves consideration investigates the opinions of local level politicians towards political participation. A study from the early 1990s looks at the elite attitudes about citizen participation in British local communities and concludes that in general politicians welcome
and encourage participation. This is mainly driven by benefits that political elites saw in citizen participation. Two thirds of the politicians considered that citizens convey clear messages through participation and almost three quarters believed that political participation helped solving the addressed problems (Parry et al. 1992). In their comparative study of local politicians in Sweden, the Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, and Russia, Szücs and Strömberg (2006) found positive attitudes towards political participation. Among the forms of political participation, the referendum is considered by three quarters of the politicians as the most effective avenue through which citizens can influence the decision-making process at the local level. The positive attitude towards political participation is stronger in the two established democracies (Sweden and the Netherlands) where politicians even refer to the increase of participatory procedures as one of their priorities in the near future. In the other four countries politicians were somewhat less enthusiastic, some of them being quite skeptical about the use and necessity of political participation.

Another strand of the literature has focused on the attitudes of future or potential politicians. One survey among the candidates for the 2013 elections in two German states found that most candidates support the expansion of political participation (Zittel & Herzog 2014). Their support for such measures was negatively correlated with the level of satisfaction with democracy and the political system: candidates who were more critical of the political system and those who lost elections favored widening political participation. According to a survey of candidates for the European and German parliament, fewer than half of respondents agreed that the parliament should make the decisions about laws and policies. This reflects lack of confidence in the ability of a political institution – for which they were running for office – to have the final word. A large majority of the respondents (roughly three quarters) favored the idea of citizens being able to initiate binding referendums (Rattinger et al. 2014).

Dissatisfied parliamentarians/Dissatisfied citizens
Due to the scarce literature on politicians’ attitudes we use the research conducted on citizen demands and parliamentary roles as sources of inspiration for the theoretical reasons underpinning our hypotheses. We hypothesize similar effects for both direct and deliberative democracy because in spite of their different logic (LeDuc 2015) they have several shared features that distinguish them from traditional representative democracy.
The first feature is the dissatisfaction with the system of political representation. Citizens have gradually lost confidence that the political institutions and their office holders can perform their duties and responsibilities. The large number of failures in policy delivery, mishandles situations, slow decisions or corruption scandals shed a negative light on the process of representation. The members of society have become increasingly critical over time (Norris 2011; Dalton 2013) and started making demands for types of involvement that either bypasses the state institutions in the decision-making process (direct democracy) or allows citizens to contribute to the quality of decisions (deliberation) (Smith 2009; Altman 2011; Geissel & Newton 2012).

Recent research pointed in the direction of differentiating between general dissatisfaction with democracy and that with institutions of representative democracy. Dissatisfaction with the legislative institution is a better predictor of the preference for direct democracy than the general political dissatisfaction (Gherghina & Geissel 2018). According to these findings, citizens who reject the notion of parliament as the best institution to decide on laws are more oriented towards referendums. And when citizens are unhappy with the results of debates from the political arena or with the type of policy compromise reached after negotiations between political parties, they may turn to deliberation. The latter ensures a process of discourse that leads to better-informed preferences, more thorough understanding of the available options and eventually to more legitimate decisions (Fishkin 1995; Reuchamps & Suiter 2016).

We would expect similar reactions from the parliamentarians who are dissatisfied with legislative activity (H1) or who are critical towards the system of representation (H2). From an instrumentalist view, legislators may express a preference for alternative means of policy-making involving the public if they believe that despite the general public popularity of a proposal they believe that the proposal is blocked in committee and/or plenary sessions by intense minorities within the law-making body. Alternatively (though not necessarily mutually exclusive), from a philosophical commitment to public engagement, parliamentarians belonging to populist parties, or those expressing a commitment to the principle of public engagement in policy-making may seek to contest the authority of established systems of representation. One way to do so is through referendums that escape the parliamentary debate and target popular legitimacy as it happened in the 2016 referendum in Hungary (Gessler 2017).
On the other hand, there are plenty of reasons to believe that legislators might prefer less public ‘meddling’ in the legislative process. Elaine Povich, of The Pew Research Center, notes an interesting dynamic occurring in American states allowing citizen initiatives. In 2016, there were 76 ballot initiatives across the American states on the ballot, the highest number in a decade. Citing Maurice Cunningham, Povich asserts that traditionally ballot measures were likely to be introduced when the citizenry felt that the state’s legislature was not acting according to the public’s will (Povich 2017). More recently, with the professionalization of initiative use by organized groups in states like California, those organized factions that have been unsuccessful in lobbying efforts within legislatures tend to introduce their preferred policies as ‘citizen’ initiatives (Povich 2017). Beyond the issue of initiatives being specifically used to bypass and circumvent legislatures (and legislators), state-level law-makers in the U.S. have been increasing willing to modify and even overturn successful citizen initiatives arguing that they are poorly written, do not take account of existing law and would have unintended consequences (Povich 2017). In short, there are inherent tensions between (legislators’ views of) legislative processes and direct democracy outcomes (see Gerber et al. 2001) and plenty of reason to assume that law-makers might be highly skeptical of direct democracy.

It is less clear how parliamentarians may view deliberative democracy initiatives. There is plenty of evidence of elected officials actively engaging in deliberative events (Fishkin 2011; ), from the first televised ‘deliberative poll,’ held in Manchester, England (see Luskin, Fishkin & Jowell 2002) to more recent events in Ireland (Suiter, Farrell & O’Malley 2014). That said, elite participation should not be construed to be the same as elite support for deliberative democracy. To our knowledge there are fewer assessments of elected officials’ support for deliberative mechanisms (but see 2006a; Carman & Ipsos-MORI 2009 for parliamentarians’ views of the Scottish petitions system).

The style and focus of representation
In spite of the normative perspective behind the principal-agent model, which emphasizes delegation and accountability relationships between voters and MPs (Matthews & Valen 1999; Bergman et al. 2000), things are more nuanced in reality. In addition to their role as agents, politicians also act as gatekeepers when deciding what forms of political engagement exist in a polity and when they can take place. For example, in many countries an
Unauthorized protest results in the punishment (e.g. fines or imprisonment) of those who participate. Similarly, although citizens may have high demands for referendums, the parliamentarians are the ones who decide if and when to introduce this decision-making procedure among the available options.

Earlier research pointed at the ambivalent role of politicians in the decision-making process. On the one hand, they can be "participation entrepreneurs" by stimulating and shaping the form, content, and the direction of participation through their actions (Vetter 2008). On the other hand, politicians can have a demotivating effect on citizens and decrease incentives for and chances of successful participation (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993). And, as noted above, they may modify or even repeal policies mandated through successful citizen initiatives (Gerber et al. 2001). The power of their office in playing any of these roles is supported by the theoretical arguments of the elitist theory of democracy according to which there are very few active, informed and responsible citizens in a society (Michels 1911; Schumpeter 1950; Sartori 1987). Under this view, the citizenry is far less able to identify the common good and/or efficient and effective policies, thus elected representatives assert their judgment and expertise in developing policy (Burke 1774; Hamilton, Madison & Jay 1788).

According to their approach towards representation, the legislators can be divided into several categories. The first category is that of delegates who follow strictly the principal-agent model and act in accordance with what their constituents (voter delegate) or parties (party delegate) ask them to do (Pitkin 1967). A second category is that of trustees who rely more on their own judgements when taking a decision in Parliament (Eulau & Karps 1977; Converse & Pierce 1986; Carman 2006b; Barker & Carman 2012). The third category is that of politico who alternate between trustee and delegate, depending on the situation (Wahlke et al. 1962). We assert that MPs who see themselves as voter delegates and as trustees are more likely to favor both direct and deliberative democracy when compared to party delegates or politicos. The argument for voter delegates is quite straightforward: research shows an increasing demand on the side of citizens for more possibilities to participate in politics. Legislators, although they may be sometimes biased towards the will of their constituents and misperceive them (Broockman & Skovron 2018), are likely to display attitudes that reflect these demands and thus favor direct and deliberative
democracy (H3a). In contrast, party delegates would not want to take decision-power from the hands of their parties and thus oppose direct and deliberative processes.

A more nuanced argument applies to trustees especially in the context of earlier studies showing that parliamentarians who judge situations on their own could choose to oppose referendums. Parliamentarians who see themselves as trustees of the common European interest do not wish their decisions to be confirmed or validated through referendums, a finding applicable to the question about referendums on the EU treaties (Rose & Borz 2013). However, the logic behind the trustee style is fairly similar to that behind the participation in referendums and deliberations. Trustee parliamentarians rely on their own set of ethics and principles to take decisions on the issues of the day (i.e. proposed legislation) and what is in the best interest of their constituents. Similarly, citizens voting in referendums have been, from a young age, socialized into a set of internalized values and use those, along with other queues, to decide on their own across issues (i.e. those subjected for referendums) and take decisions based on assessments of what is in the polity’s best interest. Moreover, trustees engage in parliamentary debates and deliberation with reasoned arguments (Judge 1999), a feature that characterizes deliberative events outside Parliament (Fishkin 2011). Consequently, we can expect trustees to be favorable to direct and deliberative democracy (H3b) because they mirror the logic that they follow in their daily activities. Politicos mix attitudes and for this reason they are sometimes also party delegates, with a lower propensity to support direct and deliberative democracy.

The focus of representation can also influence the attitudes towards direct and deliberative democracy. According to the distinction formulated by Eulau & Karps, (1977), representational focus refers to the level and type of constituency on which a parliamentarian chooses to concentrate her attention. Representational focus has generally come to be associated with geographic focus, that is whether a legislator concentrates on representing their specific constituency interests, or the wider national interest (see Burke, 1774); however, there are other possible foci for legislators’ attention such as traditionally marginalized groups (Eulau & Karps 1977). A more nuanced approach towards the focus of representation uses three criteria: geographically defined interests, functional interests and partisan interests (Brack et al. 2012). Our argument is a closer territorial focus combined with partisan attachment is likely to determine a favorable attitude of the parliamentarians towards direct and deliberative democracy (H4). The logic behind the mechanism is that
parliamentarians establish stronger linkages with their voters from constituencies because they often intend to seek re-election and/or want to ensure voters/constituents believe the MP is looking after their interests. One potential way to send that message way is to voice support for procedures that emphasise public participation in policy formulation. The more concrete and localized the parliamentarian’s representational focus, the more likely they may be to support direct citizen influence. That said, given the potential for parliamentarians to be dismissive of processes that circumvent the traditional representative-constituent relationship (discussed above), we would expect a stronger preference of the parliamentarians for deliberative democracy, which may be seen as less invasive. Further, legislators may believe, as do many political theorists, that participation in deliberation enhances social trust, determines citizens to undertake collective action and creates a general feeling of community (Crick & Lockyer 2010; Gronlund et al. 2010; Povich 2017).

Finally, whilst thus far we have largely discussed MP’s support for the two types of democratic reforms – deliberative and direct democracy – jointly, we should clarify that there is no a priori reason to think that MPs will value both types of reforms equally. Indeed, given the reforms’ differing internal logic (LeDuc 2015) we can hypothesize that parliamentarians will be less inclined to support referendums than deliberative democracy reforms (H5). As we have discussed above, referendums are, by their very nature, designed to circumvent traditional representational relationships. In effect, referendums, involving the citizenry directly in the policy-making process, diminish elected officials’ power and authority and, indeed, are often a recognition that the political system is unable to resolve matters through standard processes (Povich 2017). LeDuc, for instance, notes that referendums are, ‘sometimes called because a government party finds itself divided on an important issue’ (2015: 140). On the other hand it could be the case that for intractable and highly emotive political issues, shifting the decision to the public, rather than taking it within the parliament, helps to insulate MPs from negative repercussions of unpopular or contentious decisions. In contrast, deliberative events are designed to inform political processes and are less often tied to binding decisions. At least for the idealized form of deliberative democracy, LeDuc states, ‘citizens would be more positively disposed toward their institutions and processes of governance…. Leaders in turn would be more confident that they enjoyed broad public support, because…difficult and complex political decisions would be more complex and transparent’ (2015: 139).
Controls

In addition to these main predictors, we control for a series of variables that were identified in the literature as having a potential impact on legislator’s attitudes toward representational reforms: age, gender, and left-right self-placement.\(^1\) It is well established that socio-economic variables tend to have a direct effect on attitudes related to direct or deliberative democracy. For example, younger citizens tend to favor direct democratic decision-making (Gherghina & Geissel 2018). Gender may shape parliamentarians’ attitudes towards the two alternative models of democracy through the emphasis they place on various types of representation, e.g. substantive, descriptive, symbolic etc. (Pitkin 1967; see also Carman 2006). The self-positioning on the ideological left-right axis could also play a relevant part since those parties on the left side of the spectrum are more inclined towards inclusiveness and egalitarianism (Ware 1996; Gallagher et al. 2005; Barker and Carman 2012); consequently, the MPs belonging to that side of the political spectrum may be more inclined to support direct and deliberative democracy.

Research Design

This paper uses the attitudinal survey collected in the frame of the PartiRep Comparative MP Survey project (Deschouwer & Depauw 2014). The survey was carried out among national and regional legislators across 14 European democracies: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom\(^2\). In addition to socio-demographics and career patterns, the survey asked MPs about their role as representatives, connection to groups in society, relation to their party. Crucially, it also contains measures relating to MPs’ satisfaction with the functioning of parliamentary democracy and their support for alternative forms of decision-making processes. In this analysis we include only the MPs from national parliaments. MPs were invited to respond either through an online web-survey (32%), print questionnaires (42.3%), face-to-face interviews (24.9%), or by telephone (0.8%). Data were collected between spring

\(^1\) We tested for a series of other control variables such as seniority or interactions with citizens, but the effects were neither strong nor statistically significant and we do not report them.

\(^2\) The PartiRep survey project also included Israel, which is left out from thus analysis given our focus on geographically European countries.
2009 and winter 2012, with an average response rate of 19.5% across parliaments surveyed, although this rate varies from one parliament to another – below 15% in Italy, France, the United Kingdom and Poland; above 40% in the Netherlands and in Belgium. In spite of these different response rates, the sample remains representative of the population (Deschouwer et al. 2014). The final sample includes 944 MPs.

**Measuring MPs’ support for referendum and deliberative events**

In order to measure MPs’ support for the two alternative models of democracy, we refer to referendums – the most common form of direct democracy – and to deliberative events. We use a question asking MPs about their opinion on the desirability to reform the democratic decision-making process in various ways. The question is: “In recent years, different views on voters’ distrust of politicians and political parties have inspired widely diverging suggestions for reform. Of each of the following directions that reform could take, could you indicate how desirable you consider them?” Two of the propositions referred to “increase the number of referendums”, while another was about “increase the number of deliberative events, where groups of ordinary citizens debate and decide on a particular issue”. These two items asked MPs to give their opinion on the desirability to implement alternative models of democracy that would increase citizens’ say in the decision-making process: direct democracy, through the use of referendum, and deliberative democracy.

For each item, MPs were asked to position themselves on a forced-choice (no neutral middle category) Likert type scale ranging from 1 (“not at all desirable”) to 4 (“very desirable”). Figure 1 depicts the frequency distribution of preferences and leads to two general observations. First, there is great variation regarding the level of support displayed by the parliamentarians towards the two alternative models of democracy. Second, confirming H5, above, deliberative events have more traction than referendums among the surveyed parliamentarians. Increasing the number of deliberative events seems to attract greater support (around 70% consider them as desirable, i.e. the sum of the fairly and very desirable) than increasing the frequency of referendum (only 35% see them as desirable). Both variables positively and significantly correlate, but the coefficient is not high (Spearman’s rho= 0.268, p< 0.001). This empirical evidence confirms earlier research (LeDuc 2015) that these two alternative models of democracy have a different logic and they are
accordingly perceived differently. We investigate the support for each of separately in the analysis.

**Figure 1: Distribution of support for referendum and deliberative events (in percentage)**

![Bar chart showing distribution of support for referendum and deliberative events](chart.png)

Note: Number of valid answers: 926 for referendums and 927 for deliberative events.

**Independent and control variables**

We measure MPs’ dissatisfaction with legislative activity (H1) through a question asking how satisfied they are in general with the performance of the Parliament and parliamentarians in fulfilling the following tasks: (1) scrutinizing the government, (2) representing the views and interests of the voters, and (3) doing legislative work.\(^3\) Satisfaction is measured through a four-point Likert scale that ranges from “very unsatisfied” to “very satisfied”. Satisfaction with these three activities correlate significantly (Spearman’s rho scores around 0.4, \(^3\) Another question in the PartiRep survey asked MPs to tell how true or false they think several statements apply to their day-to-day work in parliament. These items were quite specific (e.g. ‘Members frequently question another member’s sincerity and integrity in public’, ‘Confidential party discussions usually find their way to the media’, ‘Members frequently take parliamentary initiatives without the parliamentary party’s authorization’). Although interesting per se, these items do not directly help measuring MPs’ satisfaction. Empirically, no clear patterns emerge from the exploration of the data (no clear correlations or underlying factor). Hence, we leave this question out.)
p>0.001). We reduce the number of dimensions using a factor analysis (principal component factor). One factor emerges from the data (eigen value 1.88) on which the three items highly load (factor loadings between 0.75 and 0.81). The underlying factor accounts for 63% of the total variance. We use this factor to measure MPs’ general satisfaction with the working of parliament.

The degree to which MPs are critical towards the system of representation (H2) is measured with two variables. First, we use the answers to the following question ‘It is often stated that voters have lost trust in politics and politicians. Below are a few statements that are very commonly heard in this regard. Regarding each of these commonly heard statements, could you indicate whether you personally agree or disagree?’\textsuperscript{4}. The answers range on a five-point Likert scale (1 ‘strongly disagree’, 2 ‘disagree’, 3 ‘neither’, 4 ‘agree’, 5 ‘strongly agree’) for the following items: “The state no longer possesses the capacity to solve society’s most pressing needs”, “parties make too many promises on which they cannot deliver” and “most politicians are out of touch with people’s concerns”. A principal component factor analysis reveals one factor (Eigen value 1.45) accounting for 48% of the total variance. We use this factor as a measure of MPs’ critical assessment or resentment towards the current political system. Second, we measure MPs’ critical assessment of the electoral process as an effective way to channel citizens’ demand. This second measure focuses on a procedural aspect of representative democracy that implies delegating power through election, while the first variable asked about the capacity or integrity of the actors (the state, the parties and politicians). MPs’ opinion about the effectiveness of voting in elections for channeling citizens’ demands is operationalized using the answers to the question “There are many opinions on how citizens can most effectively influence decisions in society. Can you indicate for [vote in elections] how effective you think it is, 1 being not at all effective and 7 being very effective?”.

In order to measure MPs’ style of representation (H3), we use the classical ‘dilemma’ asking MPs to choose whose position they will follow when voting in case of disagreement: (1) the party’s position versus their own opinion, (2) their own opinion versus voters’ opinion\textsuperscript{4}, (3) voters’ opinion versus the party position\textsuperscript{5}. We identify four categories of MPs:

\textsuperscript{4} ‘How should, in your opinion, a Member of Parliament vote if his/her own opinion on an issue does not correspond with the opinion of his/her voters? a. … according to his/her own opinion b. … according to the opinion of his/her voters’.

\textsuperscript{5} ‘How should, in your opinion, a Member of Parliament vote if his/her own opinion on an issue does not correspond with the opinion of his/her voters? a. … according to his/her own opinion b. … according to the opinion of his/her voters’.
1) party-delegate style, 2) trustee style (MPs choosing their own opinion), 3) voter-delegate style (MPs choosing their voters) and 4) politico including MPs who do not consistently chose one “principal” to follow or who did not answer to one of the questions. The distribution of MPs across these categories is the following: party-delegate (42%), trustee (32.7%), voter-delegate (11.4%) and mixed (13.8%). We use these categories as dummies, and the models specifically look at the effect of voter-delegate and trustee, in accordance with H3a and H3b.

The importance MPs attribute to representing voters and groups, i.e. the focus of representation (H4), is the next independent variable considered. The survey asked “How important is it to you, personally, to promote the views and interests of the following groups of people?”. Three items are considered, on which respondents were asked to position themselves on a scale from 1 to 7: the importance of promoting the views and interests of (1) all the people who voted for your party (mean=5.69, std=1.24), (2) a specific group in society (mean=5.49, std=1.26)\(^6\), (3) all the people in the country (mean=5.23, std=1.62). Levels of support are high for all three items, and items (1) and (2) correlate at a significant level (spearman’s rho= 0.26, p< 0.001). Note that that data is missing for a quite substantial number of respondents (25 for item 1, 55 for item 2, 37 for item 3). The measurement for control variables is straightforward: age is a count variable in completed years at the time of survey, gender is a dichotomous variable (man=0, woman=1) and left-right self-placement on the usual 11-point ordinal scale (0= left and 10=right).\(^7\)

**Analysis**

Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variables, the analysis explores the individual-level factors of support for referendum and deliberative democracy though ordinal logit. However, in order to ease the interpretation of the findings, we use linear predictions to

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\(^5\) ‘How should, in your opinion, a Member of Parliament vote if his/her voters have one opinion and his/her party takes a different position? a. ... according to the opinion of his/her voters, b. ... according to his/her party’s opinion’.

\(^6\) We have also considered delineating between the type of group (e.g. women, young, elderly, employee, self-employed, farmers, religious groups etc.). However, data was missing for a high number of respondents (around 80), and the type of group was highly linked to the left-right orientation of respondents – left-wing MPs highlighting groups such as women, ethnic minorities and employees; right-wing MPs highlighting groups such as self-employed, religious groups and farmers/fishermen.

\(^7\) We also considered controlling for MPs’ intention to run at the next election. However, data is missing for the Netherlands. Besides, no evidence was found of any effect or altering of the general findings when introducing the variable in the models.
produce the graphs below. Findings are highly similar in ordinal and linear models. Given the nested nature of the data, we cluster the data by country. Table 1 includes six models, three for direct democracy and three for deliberative democracy. Model 1 includes the effect of satisfaction with legislative work, resentment towards the current system, assessment of the effectiveness of the election, and the style and focus of representation. Model 2 includes only the control variables, while model 3 includes all independent and control variables. Note that the models report proportional odds ratio.

Regarding support for referendum, the effects of satisfaction with legislative work, resentment towards the current system and assessment of the effectiveness of election as a way for channeling citizens’ demand appear highly significant. In non-linear terms, a one unit increase in resentment multiples by 1.27 the odds of moving from ‘not very desirable’ to ‘fairly desirable’ or ‘very desirable’ (though statistical significance is somewhat less than robust). These odds decrease with satisfaction with legislative work and with a positive assessment of the effectiveness of election (odds multiplied by around 0.8). In short, the more effective MPs think existing legislative and electoral processes are at channeling public demands, the less inclined they are to support referendums.

MPs’ style of representation matters as well: compared to those MPs to profess a commitment to their party’s pledges, those MPs exposing a voter-delegate style multiplies the odds of moving from a lower category to a higher category on the Likert scale by 1.5, and this value scores around 1.4 for trustee style. If we flip this and emphasise the comparison category, MPs expressing a greater commitment to their parties, rather than their voters or even their own personal positions, tend to be less supportive of referendums. The effect is statistically significant for the two styles. Regarding the models’ fit, we cannot directly estimate as in linear regression models the proportion of explained variability in the response data, but comparing the pseudo R2, Akaike-Information Criteria (AIC) and Bayesian-Information Criteria (BIC), we see that the independent variables have a higher explanatory power than the control variables. Regarding the effect of control variables, age decreases support for referendum: a one-unit increase in age multiplies the odds of moving from a lower category to a higher one by 0.98.
Table 1: Ordinal logit explaining the support for referendum and deliberative events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Referendum (M1)</th>
<th>Referendum (M2)</th>
<th>Referendum (M3)</th>
<th>Deliberative events (M1)</th>
<th>Deliberative events (M2)</th>
<th>Deliberative events (M3)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with legislative work</td>
<td>0.79*</td>
<td>0.79*</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.86</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resentment towards current system</td>
<td>1.27+</td>
<td>1.29+</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of election</td>
<td>0.84*</td>
<td>0.81*</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter-delegate style</td>
<td>1.44**</td>
<td>1.53**</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee style</td>
<td>1.37+</td>
<td>1.46*</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of representing voters of the party</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.19***</td>
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<td>0.82***</td>
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Notes: The reported coefficients are odds-ratios
Statistical significance: + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

The support for deliberative events presents a different story. None of the variables related to dissatisfaction or assessment of the current system appears significant. However, the focus of representation seems important: a one unit increase in the importance MPs give to representing the voters of the party multiplies the odds of considering deliberative events more desirable by almost 1.2. However, the model fit indicates that control variables better predict support for deliberative events: women are 1.7% more likely to move from ‘not at all desirable’ to a higher category than men, and a one unit move towards the right on the left-right scale decreases the probability to move from a lower to higher category by *0.8.

Figures 2 and 3 plot the linear effect of two significant variables: resentment towards the current system and the importance of representing the views and interests of the voters of the party. The figures well illustrate the different logics for direct and deliberative democracy. On figure 2, resentment towards the current system increases support for referendum, while it has no effect on support for deliberative events.
Figure 2: Resentment towards current system and support for

a. referendum

b. deliberative events

In Figure 3, the importance of representing the views and interests of the voters of the party significantly increases support for deliberative events, but has no significant effect on support for referendum.

Figure 3: Importance of representing the voters of the party and support for

a. referendum

b. deliberative events

Overall, hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 (both 3a and 3b) are confirmed for support for referendum, while H4 is verified in the case of deliberative democracy. Support for the two models of democracy clearly indicates different logics, as we discuss below.
Conclusion

This paper aimed to explain parliamentarians’ support for referendums and deliberative debates in Europe. With the decline in both specific and diffuse support across established democracies, parliaments and governments are seeking ways to improve the links between publics and their governing institutions. The fear, of course, is that declining support for political institutions and processes highly correlates with a disinclination to obey laws, pay taxes, adhere to conventional norms of civility and tolerance in the public sphere. Indeed, many go so far as to argue that the health of democracies lay in the balance. Advocates assert that both deliberative and direct democratic reforms are, if not a panacea for what ills democracies, then a salve on the wounds. Yet, in substantially and perhaps fundamentally altering the traditional representational relationships that are a cornerstone of modern representative democracies, inherent tensions may arise between traditional legislative processes and the newer democratic reforms (or the ways in which those reforms are currently leveraged to adopt policies). Whilst it is obviously important to understand how the public engages with and supports these democratic innovations, it is equally important to improve our understanding of how law-makers perceive and evaluate innovations that may substantially change how they relate to their voters.
Direct democracy constitutes a set of tools meant to bypass traditional representative institutions, which are increasingly seen as ineffective and inefficient means to channel citizens’ demands. On the side of citizens and legislators, criticisms addressed to the existing system encompass various dimensions: dissatisfaction with the role of parliaments in fulfilling its main tasks, including representing the people and controlling government; skepticism towards the efficiency of the electoral processes to adequately process citizens’ demand; and resentment towards parties, parliamentarians and the state, which are seen as unable or unwilling to respond to society’s challenges and issues. Similar to the citizens they aim to represent, legislators also give voice to a lack of confidence in the institutions and decision-making processes they take part in, and as a consequence consider direct democracy as the alternative to the deficiencies of the representative system. Interestingly, and coherently, support for referendums is greater among legislators adopting a style of representation away from the party-delegate style – i.e. away from the representative party-based model of democracy. In this sense, it is not surprising to find claims for increasing the number of referendums in populist discourses (e.g. the UK’s Brexit campaign) or among MPs situated at the extremes of the left-right spectrum (Núñez & Close 2014). For these actors, support for referendums goes hand in hand with criticisms of traditional structures and processes of representative democracy, and with a style of representation that tends to deemphasize the role of parties in the representational system.

Drivers of support for deliberative democracy do not follow the same logic. Support for deliberation is not rooted in dissatisfaction or rejection of parliamentary democracy, and one explanation of this might be that deliberation is part of the everyday life of parliaments, especially through work in committees. The functioning of deliberative events may resemble that of an elected assembly, except that citizens directly intervene and interact with one another, are not attached to party groups and are not pressured by the prospect of upcoming elections. In addition, deliberation, in contrast to referendums, demands that the diversity of interests and ideas are taken into account in the decision-making process. This may be reflected somehow in the importance that legislators attribute to representing the interests and preferences of voters gathered around distinct partisan projects.

So far, the analysis presented in this paper has demonstrated that parliamentarians’ views on direct democracy innovations (i.e., referendums) are somewhat clearer and easier to predict than their views on deliberative innovations. Those law-makers who tend to think
that existing legislative processes work appropriately and that elections remain a key link between voters and parliamentarians, allowing for the expression of public sentiment on the key issues of the day, also tend to voice less support for referendums. And it seems to be equally the case that MPs who express support for the strong parties model of parliamentary democracy also tend to put less stock in mechanisms designed to give the public direct voice in the policy-making process. These findings are consistent with what we would expect.

Support for deliberative mechanisms, however, seems somewhat more elusive and difficult to predict with our current models.

At the end of the day, we are seeking to better understand elected politicians support for democratic reforms and how much ‘democracy’, or popular input into the law-making process, is considered ideal. This is not a new debate. This issue dates back to some of the classic debates and arguments around political representation (Burke 1774). In the founding of the United States, Madison, Hamilton and Jay argued in The Federalist (1788) that public passions, opinions and participation needed to be mediated by secure (and insulated) political institutions – the saucer that cools the tea. Edmund Burke expressed similar ideas in his famous letter to the electors of Bristol (1774). On the other hand, American founders such as Jefferson argued that public political participation had an educative effect and would improve the character and quality of the citizenry should popular participation be expanded and extended (see Cain, Dalton & Scarrow 2003 for discussion). Recognising the pivotal and crucial role political elites play in developing and shaping democratic institutions
### Appendix 1: Summary statistics of the variables included in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.</th>
<th>Min</th>
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List of references:


University Press.


für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 293–313.