What Happens After A Local Referendum?

The effect of direct democratic decision-making on protest intentions

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Abstract

Proponents of direct democracy claim that participation in decision-making stimulates future engagement. However, there is also evidence showing that participation is lower in systems that provide comparatively more opportunities for direct democratic involvement. Hence, it is unclear whether direct democratic involvement promotes or discourages other forms of political participation. In this study, the relationship between direct democratic involvement and the intention for political protest is evaluated empirically, based on data that was gathered in the scope of a local referendum in Belgium. Unique two-wave panel data from before and after the referendum is complemented by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with local policymakers and citizens. While the findings generally support the claim that direct democratic involvement fosters future participation, there is no indication that the relationship is mediated by political efficacy. Apparently, the theory of participatory democracy is also useful in societies that have little experience with direct democratic decision-making.

Keywords: direct democracy; political protest; participatory democracy; local referendums; Belgium

Introduction

Proponents of direct democracy emphasize the educative value of citizens' direct democratic participation in the decision-making process. They claim that the involvement of citizens boosts their political knowledge and interest, and strengthens their democratic orientations, civic skills and attitudes (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). This educative effect is argued to result from participation and is expected to enhance and facilitate citizens' participation in the future – creating a self-sustaining participatory system. It is hence the act of participation itself which is expected to advance future participation. While the idea of empowering and educating citizens through involvement appears highly appealing in a time in which representative democracy is arguably 'in crisis' (Della Porta, 2013), empirical evidence supporting this relationship is mixed. It is therefore the aim of this paper to investigate whether the experience of direct democratic engagement on the local level can indeed increase the willingness to participate in the future. The research question guiding this study reads as follows: Is there any indication for an educative effect even after one single local referendum?

Political participation is essential for citizens because it allows them to voice their preferences and demands and because citizens can pressure political authorities by means of participation – ensuring that their interests are effectively taken into account (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995). While this instrumental value of participation is widely pronounced in different strands of the participation literature, advocates of participatory democracy stress a second function of political participation – its educative function. Participatory democrats such as Pateman (1970) and Barber (1984) argue that participation in decision-making processes stimulates participants' personal capacities (e.g. organisational skills, learning to bring forward arguments) as well as their political self-competences (e.g. acquiring political knowledge,

gaining experience with political practices) and attitudes, all of which facilitate political participation. Pateman (1970, 45) emphasizes that 'the experience of participation in some way leaves the individual better psychologically equipped to undertake further participation in the future'. Through participation, citizens develop 'democratic personalities' (Pateman, 1970, 64); and once these personalities are developed, they are more likely to participate again, which is why the political process becomes self-sustaining and self-fulfilling (Wolfe, 1985).

This study scrutinizes this claim by investigating the link between citizens' participation in a local referendum and their intention to engage in political protest in the future. Ever since the publication of Barnes and Kaase's *Political Action* study (1979) , political protest – which represents a non-institutionalised form of political participation – has attracted much scholarly attention. It seems particularly interesting to study the potential educative effect of political participation on protest intentions, because protest behaviour has not only become a normal form of political engagement, citizens actually voice their opinion increasingly via non-institutionalised forms of engagement such as protest. Protest, therefore, has become a central and crucial component of the political participation repertoire of contemporary citizens.

While studies on direct democracy have often relied on the theory of participatory democracy (Schlozman and Yohai, 2008), empirical evidence is mixed as some scholars show that levels of participation are in fact lower in contexts that provide comparatively many opportunities for direct democratic engagement (Dalton and Weldon, 2013; Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen, 2010). Moreover, it has to be noted that participatory democrats envision an entirely different society with multiple opportunities for participation, not only in the sphere of government but also during free time activities and at the workplace (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). It therefore remains highly questionable whether an educative effect is observable when studying direct democratic initiatives in today's representative democratic system, where citizens are largely inexperienced with direct democratic decision-making.

The research question is investigated while relying on data that was gathered in the scope of a local referendum on traffic circulation in a mid-sized city in Belgium. Survey data was gathered before and after the referendum. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local policymakers and citizens who were eligible to participate in the referendum. Based on this data, this study aims to answer the question whether there is any evidence for the educative effect of direct democratic involvement at the local level.

In the following section the literature on direct democratic participation will be shortly reviewed, the case will be described and I will elaborate on the research design and the results of the analysis. The paper closes with a discussion of the results and their implications for both, scientists and policymakers.

Literature

To date, the literature on the direct link between direct democracy and political participation yields mixed results (Altman, 2013). The results of some studies support the positive relationship between direct democratic participation and future engagement. Tolbert, McNeal and Smith (2003), for instance, find that exposure to ballot initiatives in the United States increases individuals' propensity to vote and to donate money. The link between direct democratic initiatives and electoral participation is also supported by Tolbert and colleagues, (Tolbert, Grummel and Smith, 2001; Tolbert and Smith, 2005). In contrast, studying direct democratic participation in Switzerland, Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen (2010) find a negative relationship between direct democracy and electoral turnout. This negative effect on turnout is confirmed by Dalton and Weldon (2013) who compare direct democratic participation in 39 democracies, while other authors, find no effect at all (Fatke, 2015; Ladner and Fiechter, 2012).

If we focus more specifically on the relationship between direct democracy and protest behaviour, the existing literature primarily seems to find that direct democratic institutions

reduce the occurrence of protest behaviour. Fatke and Freitag (2013) for instance study the link between direct democracy and political protest in Swiss cantons. They argue that the availability of direct democratic procedures gives citizens an institutionalised channel to voice their concerns and hence reduces their need to protest. Also in the Swiss context, Kriesi and Wisler (1996) show that social movements are stimulated to use direct democratic instruments which moderates their action repertoire. The authors conclude that direct democracy 'contributes to the civilization of political conflict' (Kriesi and Wisler, 1996, 38).

Notably, these existing studies are characterized by two features. First, most research focuses on the effect of direct democratic participation on electoral turnout. Second, most of the existing studies investigate the consequences of direct democratic participation in contexts with frequent use of direct democratic instruments (i.e. Switzerland or the US). The study at hand can contribute to this literature 1) by focussing on the effects of direct democratic decision-making on a form of non-electoral political participation which is becoming increasingly important (Dalton and Welzel, 2014), and 2) by studying a local referendum in a context in which citizens have little experience with direct democratic decision-making. The second point is particularly important because direct democratic decision-making is increasingly institutionalised in countries that have so far mainly relied on representative decision-making and have only little experience with this form of engagement (Qvortrup, 2014; Scarrow, 2001).

Direct democracy: stimulating or discouraging protest in the future?

While existing studies reveal conflicting results, the theory of participatory democracy clearly assumes a positive relationship between direct democratic engagement and other forms of political participation. More specifically, participatory democrats assume that direct democratic engagement provokes a reciprocal relationship between direct involvement and attitudes and skills that facilitate participation. In summarizing the thoughts of Rousseau,

Pateman (1970, 25) describes this idea as follows: 'Once the participatory system is established, […] it becomes self-sustaining because the very qualities that are required of individual citizens if the system is to work successfully are those that the process of participation develops and fosters, the more the individual citizen participates, the better he is able to do so.'

On the one hand, it could be argued that these expectations cannot be applied to direct democratic processes in established representative democracies, as today's political systems seem far away from the 'participatory system' that participatory theorists envision (Schlozman and Yohai, 2008). Citizens in most representative systems have little opportunity to participate directly in the decision-making process and might hence not have enough possibilities to develop their democratic personality. On the other hand, direct democracy's educative effect might not necessarily result from the availability of various opportunities of participation. Rather than requiring a *large number* of participatory opportunities the educative effect could result from the *nature* of direct democratic procedures, independent of how frequently these procedures are used. In this context, Dalton and Weldon (2013) argue that direct democratic procedures could facilitate the transition to more complex forms participation due to their clear and simple set-up. Referendums result in a simple 'yes' or 'no' on a narrowly defined, specific policy outcome. They could hence act as 'gateway' to broader and possibly more intensive types of political participation, such as political protest (Dalton and Weldon 2013, 53).

Given their salience, this could be particularly true for referendums on the local level. In fact, the local level appears particularly suitable to investigate this question for several reasons. First, theorists have described the local level as an ideal arena for democratic empowerment. Particularly John Stuart Mill was convinced that citizens need to develop the necessary qualities and experiences at the local level in order to be able to engage effectively in (national) government (for an overview see Pateman, 1970). Moreover, it has been argued that decision-

making on the local level is, in comparison to the national level, more focused on the issues at stake (Oliver, Ha and Callen, 2012), representing a purer form of ideal citizen engagement. Furthermore it is claimed that voters tend to be better informed and more engaged on the local level than in national politics (Bryan, 2003). Finally, Bryan (2003) argues that on the local level, the outcome of the decision is more likely to be connected to citizens' daily life and hence the salience of the issue at stake is higher.

Based on the literature of participatory democracy and on the assumption that the local level is an ideal arena to engage citizens in direct democratic processes, it can be assumed that on the local level direct democratic engagement functions as a gateway to other forms of political participation. Direct democratic engagement is expected to empower citizens, so that they are more motivated to take part in other forms of participation such as political protest. This reasoning leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: Citizens who participated in direct democratic decision-making are more likely to protest in the future.

Furthermore, participatory democrats also describe the mechanism that links participation in decision-making with future political participation: They assume that participation in direct democratic processes strengthens citizens' political competences and attitudes advancing their 'democratic personalities' which in turn enhance future political participation. This effect of participation on competences, knowledge, skills and attitudes is described as the educative effect of participation and represents the central argument of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970) . The prevalence of this educative effect of participation has already been stressed by John Stuart Mill (1975, 274) who states:

> *Among the foremost benefits of free government is that education of the intelligence and of the sentiments, which is carried down to the very lowest ranks of the people*

when they are called to take part in acts which directly affect the great interest of their country.

In particular, it is expected that participation affects citizens' political efficacy (Bowler and Donovan, 2002; Hero and Tolbert, 2004), i.e. their perceived ability to influence the political system (internal efficacy) and their perceptions of government responsiveness (external efficacy). Political efficacy does not only represent a key political attitude (Almond and Verba, 1963), also its correlation with political participation has been described as 'one of the most important positive correlations that has emerged from empirical investigations into political behaviour and attitudes […]' (Pateman, 1970, 46). There are two major reasons why participating in decision-making should foster a sense of political efficacy. First, participation gives citizens an 'occasional voice in government' and ensures that citizens are consulted on major political issues, which arguably conveys the feeling that government is listening to them (Bowler and Donovan, 2002, 376). Second, citizens might also feel that they are being trusted which is of great importance because, citizens' self-esteem is supported and their intrinsic motivation is 'crowded in' (Frey, 1997, 1046).

However, enhanced political efficacy is not only the result of political participation, it also represents a major driving force for political engagement in general (Milbrath, 1965; Valentino, Gregorowicz and Groenendyk, 2009) and for protest behaviour in particular (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2013; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer and Leach, 2004). Starting from the assumption that participation has an educative effect on citizens, it can hence be assumed that the relationship between direct democratic participation and future protest is mediated by political efficacy. This assumption leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Participation in direct democratic decision-making affects political efficacy which in turn enhances the readiness to protest in the future.

However, as mentioned already, not all of the existing literature points in this direction. In fact, some studies even find that extensive opportunities for participation are associated with lower level of political participation (Dalton and Weldon, 2013; Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen, 2010; Möckli, 2007). Different arguments have been advanced to explain these findings: First, some scholars suggest that increased opportunities for participation lead to participatory fatigue among citizens, because citizens' capacities and motivation to process political information are limited (Bühlmann, Freitag and Vatter, 2003; Linder, 2005). Hence when citizens feel overloaded with opportunities to voice their opinion they might no longer use the participatory channels that are offered by the political system. This appears to be especially the case for socio-economically disadvantaged citizens (Kern and Hooghe, forthcoming; Lutz, 2006). Second, other scholars have argued that citizens who had the opportunity to directly participate in the decision-making process are more likely to accept the outcome of the decision (Esaiasson, Gilljam and Persson, 2012; Grimes, 2006). Following this argument, it is the increased acceptance of the decision which discourages further protest. These two arguments might apply to this case, too. People who participated already in the referendum might have the feeling that they have fulfilled their duty and are hence less willing to engage again. Moreover, the referendum might have also had a pacifying effect: Because citizens had a say on the decision they are more likely to accept its outcome and less likely to engage in protest in the future. This reasoning results in the third (competing) hypothesis:

H3: Citizens who participated in direct democratic decision-making are less likely to protest in the future.

These hypotheses are tested relying on a mixed-methods research design based on data that was gathered before and after a local referendum by means of a panel survey and semi-structured interviews. Before presenting the results, I briefly describe the case, the data, measurement and method in the following section.

Data and Methodology

Context of the Study

This study builds on data that was collected in the scope of a referendum on traffic circulation in one central neighbourhood of a mid-sized Belgian city in 2015. The referendum was the outcome of a participation project that was initiated by local policymakers in order to increase the quality of life in the neighbourhood. While the participation project also focused on other issues such as the creation of green space or the provision of social services, traffic circulation in the neighbourhood remained a point of special interest for the city's administration. A major issue in this context was that car drivers from the outskirts of the city passed through the neighbourhood to reach the city centre and policymakers aimed to reduce this traffic which was particularly noticeable during rush hours. Therefore, the city's administration drafted, in consultation with the neighbourhood's inhabitants, a new circulation plan that particularly aimed to reduce cut-through driving. However, soon after the new plans were presented to the public, fierce resistance emerged among inhabitants who feared that the new plans would severely constrain their own daily mobility.

After some protest actions the city's administration agreed that a group of citizens who opposed the new plans could develop an alternative scenario that would have to meet some basic conditions and that a referendum would be held in which all eligible inhabitants of the neighbourhood (above the age of 16) could choose between the initially drafted plan (scenario A) and the alternative scenario (scenario B). Already when proposing the referendum, local policymakers ensured that the referendum would be considered as binding and that the decision would be implemented shortly afterwards. The referendum was held on the 26th of April, 2015 and about 2,000 habitants of 7,700 eligible inhabitants casted a ballot, which amounts to a turnout of about 26 per cent. Out of those 2,000 citizens, 63 per cent opted for the arguably less

interfering circulation plan (scenario B). This quite clear result was announced on the same evening and the changes in the neighbourhood's traffic circulation were implemented in the following weeks. Because the referendum was on a local issue, it attracted a lot of attention within the neighbourhood and therefore represents a suitable case to test the hypotheses. In line with the expectation in the literature on local initiatives (Bryan 2003), both the referendum and its issue were very salient: In the weeks before the referendum took place, only about 7 per cent of the participants of our survey indicated that they had not yet heard about it. Moreover, about 57 per cent of the survey participants indicated that changing the neighbourhood's traffic circulation would strongly affect their daily mobility. Also in the interviews it was clear that the referendum was very salient in the neighbourhood, which increases the chance that it actually affected citizens' willingness for future engagement.

Data

In the neighbourhood data was gathered before and after the referendum, using postal surveys. Based on the city's official register of residents, a random sample was drawn of 1,800 citizens who lived in the neighbourhood and who were eligible to vote. These citizens were contacted in the month before the referendum and asked to fill in a postal survey[i]. 620 inhabitants followed the instructions, resulting in a response rate of about 34 per cent in the first wave. These citizens were re-contacted in the two month after the referendum with the request to fill in the second questionnaire. 85 per cent of those respondents answered again, resulting in a response rate of 28 per cent for both waves. After excluding the inconsistent entries, complete data from before and after the referendum is available for 483 inhabitants. Based on the information from the city's register of residents, the 483 respondents were compared with those

who participated in only one of the waves of the survey or who did not participate at all. These results show that while there is no significant difference in sex between respondents and those who didn't answer (or answered only once), respondents are clearly older: The average age of respondents is 51, whereas the average age of the group of non-respondents and respondents that participated in one wave only is 44.

In addition to this survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with different actors before and after the referendum. I interviewed three local politicians, two staff members of the city's administration who organised the referendum, and five citizens that were highly engaged in the participation project or the protest actions that took place before the referendum.

Measurement

For the analysis of the survey data I rely on the question *'Do you intend to take part in protest activities about traffic circulation in [neighbourhood] in the future?'* for the dependent variable. Respondents answered with 'Yes' or 'No'. The eight respondents that did not answer the question were excluded from the analysis. It has to be noted that using this variable represents a limited operationalization of future political participation. In fact the variable describes society's "mobilization potential", i.e. "[…] those members of a society, who in one way or another, may potentially be mobilized by a social movement" (Klandermans, 1997, 23).

The independent variable of interest is based on the question whether the respondent participated in the referendum. 50 per cent of the respondents indicated that they did not vote, while 48 per cent indicated that they did participate in the referendum, which shows that voting is clearly over-reported in this survey. Two reasons could explain this amount of over-reporting. First, it is possible that respondents who vote are also more likely to participate in the two waves of our survey (Olson and Witt, 2011). However, while this biases the representativeness of our sample, it does not affect the hypothesised link between direct

democratic engagement and political participation. Second, over-reporting might stem from social desirability that influences respondents when answering the question on their voting behaviour. Such a social desirability bias would of course be highly problematic for the results. However, while this possibility cannot fully be excluded, I tried to reduce it by relying on self-reported surveys instead of face-to-face interviews (Bishop and Fisher, 1995).

The second hypothesis states that the relationship between direct democratic involvement and future participation is mediated by citizens' political efficacy. To measure internal and external efficacy, a factor analysis was conducted on a battery of items that are expected to tab citizens' sense of political efficacy. In line with the literature (Niemi, Craig and Mattei, 1991), the factor analysis revealed two dimensions: one dimension tabs citizens sense of internal efficacy (i.e. their beliefs about their own competence to understand politics and to effectively participate in it), the other dimension tabs their sense of external efficacy (i.e. their beliefs about the responsiveness of political elites and institutions). For coding details and the factor analysis see Appendix A.

I furthermore control for citizens' characteristics that were previously found to be related to protesting. First of all, I control for citizens interest in politics. This variable is measured on a scale from 0 ('no interest at all') to 10 ('very interested'). Particularly in the social movement literature, one of the most studied predictors for protest is dissatisfaction. The grievance theory assumes that grievances and dissatisfaction represent a major motivation for political engagement and in particular for non-institutionalised political participation such as protesting (Gamson, 1968; Heath, 2008). In the scope of this referendum there are several aspects that can contribute to citizens' dissatisfaction. First, citizens might intend to protest in the future because they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the referendum. I control for this possibility by including a variable that represents citizens' satisfaction with the decision that was taken. Citizens could indicate how good they think the decision is on a scale from 0 ('not good at all')

to 7 (‘very good’). Second, citizens might be dissatisfied with the functioning with the local democracy in general which might drive their protest intentions. This possibility is accounted for by including the answer to the question *‘How democratic do you think is your city currently governed?’*. Respondents answered on a 11-point scale ranging from 0 (‘not at all democratic’) to 10 (‘completely democratic’). Third, citizens might be dissatisfied with the procedure that led to the decision that was taken. Following the procedural justice literature, being satisfied with the procedure that was used to achieve democratic decisions is crucial for citizens’ reaction to the decision (Esaiasson, 2010). This literature assumes that people care deeply about how decisions are made and claims that citizens are more likely to accept the outcome of a decision – independent of their preference – if they perceive the decision-making procedures as fair (Dahl, 1989; Tyler, 2000). Turning this argument around we could expect citizens who perceive the decision-making procedure as unfair to reject the decision and possibly to protest against it. I account for this argument by including a variable that measures procedural fairness perceptions. Citizens were asked *‘How fair did you find the procedure that led to the decision about the traffic circulation in [neighbourhood]?’* and their answers were registered on an eight point scale from 0 (‘Not fair at all’) to 7 (‘very fair’).

Finally, I control for whether citizens’ have protested in the past year because I want to ensure that the future potential participants are not just those citizens that are generally more engaged in protest activities.

The questions on democratic satisfaction and engagement in protest activities were also included in the first wave of the survey and I opted to include those time-lagged variables in the analysis in order to strengthen the causal inferences.

Additionally, the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and evaluated on whether they contain information that supports or rejects on one of the three hypothesis.

Results

The results are presented in three steps. First, I briefly show descriptive statistics, second the results of the logit model are presented and third I compare the findings of the panel survey with the statements about participation that were made in the interviews.

[Table 1 about here]

In a first step a simple cross-tab between voters and potential future protesters was made (Table 1). The relationship between the intention to protest in the future and participation in the referendum is significant, χ^2 (1, N=468) = 33.411, p<0.001. Referendum voters are apparently more inclined to protest in the future than non-voters. However, it was assumed that this relationship is mediated by political attitudes. To test this hypothesis and to gain more insights on the mechanism behind the relationship, a multiple regression analysis was conducted in the second step.

Given the binary dependent variable I opted for a logit analysis. In Model I (Table 2) I only introduce the variable of interest. The results of the descriptive analysis are confirmed, as there is indeed a positive relationship between direct democratic involvement and the probability to intent to participate in the future.

In Model II I introduce the potential mediators, i.e. internal and external political efficacy. If the relationship between direct involvement and future participation is indeed mediated by political efficacy, we should find that the direct effect of voting on protest intentions disappears in Model II. However, this is not the case. The effect of voting even increases and remains highly significant. The analysis aims to test the proposed mechanism that direct democratic involvement affects external and internal efficacy, and those attitudes boost future participation. However, this mechanism in not supported by the analysis. Both, internal and

external efficacy affect future willingness to participate, but they do not moderate the relationship between direct democratic involvement and future engagement. It has to be noted that there is either a direct link between direct democracy and protest intentions or the relationship is moderated by variables that have not been included in the model. Interestingly, this relationship also holds, when controlling for citizens' potential dissatisfaction in Model III.

Model III shows that high levels of satisfaction with local democracy and perceived procedural fairness come along with a lower probability to intent to protest in the future. Apparently, the more satisfied citizens are with the functioning of local democracy and the fairer they perceived the procedure the less likely they are to engage in future protest. Satisfaction with the decision itself however is positively related with protest intentions.

[Table 2 about here]

Finally, in Model IV the last and arguably strictest control variable, namely past engagement in protest, is included in the analysis. As expected this variable is closely connected with potential future engagements: not only is the effect highly significant, also its size appears substantial. However, interpreting the result based on logit coefficients is not straightforward. Therefore, predicted probabilities were computed based on Model IV, which is considered the final model.

[Table 3 about here]

As Table 3 shows, among those who did not participate in the protest activities in the year that preceded the referendum, voters have a clearly higher predicted probability to protest than non-voters (26 per cent versus 11 per cent). Among those who protested in the past, the highest predicted probability of protesting in the future is found with 53 per cent for those who participated in the referendum, compared to those who did not participate (with a predicted probability of 27 per cent). However, this difference is not statistically significant. Apparently voting in a local referendum only makes a difference for citizens who are inexperienced with protesting. This, however, can still be considered as a massive effect as 85 per cent of citizens indeed do not have this kind of experience. Interestingly, this finding shows that the referendum seems to trigger in particular future participation of 'first-timers' (Verhulst and Walgrave, 2009), by empowering particularly those citizens who are inexperienced with political engagement. This is remarkable, because as Verhulst and Walgrave (2009) argue inexperienced protesters have to overcome considerably higher participation barriers when deciding whether to become active or not, as compared to experienced protesters. For experienced activists participation in the referendum does not affect their intention to protest in the future. This is probably because, given their history of participation, they already express higher intentions to protest in the future, independent of their participation in the referendum. If we want to increase participation across the population, however, this first-time learning experience of those who used to be inactive is of crucial importance.[ii]

The finding that there is a link between the direct democratic procedure that took place in the neighbourhood and political participation was also confirmed in the interviews that were conducted with the local policymakers who initiated the participation project[iii]. In fact, the qualitative data did not contain any support for H3, however some statements were made that support the assumption made by participatory democrats. Among the most clear expressions of this reasoning is the statement of a local policymaker who said:

… look at the energy that arose in this neighbourhood, look how people are involved. There are some that are angry about us and others that aren't, but that is just going to pass. What stays is the fact that people became engaged in their neighbourhood, that they took responsibility for their environment. Some are revolting, others feel acknowledged. The fact that people could take a decision and that we could implement policy base on that decision is incredibly valuable. And there are many politicians who would prefer deathly silence in the context of citizen participation, so that they can decide without ruffle or excitement – but I like the movement in the city because it causes a lot more dynamics and it helps us to achieve better decisions.

This positive vibe is also confirmed by another local policymaker who was involved in the project:

I really believe in citizen participation, because due to this process many people in the neighbourhood took responsibility. Those that could contribute to the process and that did so, did it in a brilliant way. And people felt responsible — a lot more responsible and a lot more engaged. The fact that there is so much controversy now is of course due to the fact that people are very involved. I think this degree of engagement can never be reached if we just take decisions in the town hall. […] I have seen how many people got to know each other in the course of this process – that's enormous! They say: "Well, we live here since years but we got to know our neighbours all at once." There is some sort of cohesion that emerged… unfortunately in the context of mobility there was also some polarisation because we had these two groups [that supported the two opposing scenarios].

Both the mobilising effects but also this fear that the referendum would polarize the neighbourhood were issues that came up in the conversations and interviews that were

conducted with some of the involved inhabitants of the neighbourhood. For instance, one participant, whom I interviewed about one and a half month after the referendum explained:

> *The positive effect of the participation project was that a couple of inhabitants were mobilised that would have never been mobilised otherwise. In action groups, neighbourhood committees, etc. a couple of inhabitants became active — but the energy went mostly in the "fight against" and then you end up with camps that oppose each other and this negative tension is still present today. In neighbourhood committees and when organizing neighbourhood parties, you can still feel this tension resulting from the participation project – it has left a mark….*

So while the mobilising effect of the direct democratic process has clearly been perceived by both citizens and policymakers, there is also a fear that the referendum had polarized the neighbourhood. As a battery on social cohesion was included in both waves, I have tested whether I could find support for this polarisation in the survey data. However, there were no significant changes detectable (for coding details and the analysis see Appendix C). Presumably, this feeling of polarisation was mainly an issue for those actors who were deeply involved with the process.

Discussion

This study shows that participants who voiced their opinion in one single referendum are more likely to participate in future protest than citizens who did not cast a ballot. However, this effect holds only for citizens who have little experience with political protest. Routine protesters are willing to engage in the future – independent of their participation in the referendum. For first-time protesters however, the experience of participating in the local referendum seems crucial. This empowering and mobilising effect of the direct democratic process has also been observed by local politicians and citizens and they brought this topic up during the interviews that were

conducted. However, the argument that this relationship was mediated by political efficacy was not confirmed by the analysis. So while both the qualitative and the quantitative data supports the claim that direct democratic involvement fosters participation in the future, as proposed in the first hypothesis, the mechanism does not work via increased efficacy. Participatory democrats assume that the effect of participation is educative because it strengthens citizens' competences, knowledge, skills and attitudes and they pay special attention to the role of citizen's political efficacy. While this analysis cannot establish the privileged role of political efficacy, it is still possible that other factors such as an increased knowledge about political issues, skills or other competences and attitudes mediate the participation-participation nexus.

This finding can contribute to the scholarly literature by providing evidence for the claim that direct democratic decision-making can empower citizens to participate in the future. Notably, this effect was found when citizens participated once only. One the one hand, this exemplifies the applicability of the theory of participatory democracy even in societies that are arguably far away from what Pateman (1970) has called a 'participatory society': Even in representative systems where citizens have little experience with the direct democratic process, participation can trigger the willingness to engage in the future. One the other hand, this finding does not allow to reject the claim that participation in direct democratic decision-making might eventually lead to a participatory fatigue, because in this case citizens have participated only once.

Furthermore, there are also several limitations to this study, which should be mentioned. First of all, relying on the intention to protest in the future represents a very narrow operationalization of political participation, because it measures an intention and not actual behaviour and because it taps only one form of (non-institutionalised) political participation. It would have been desirable to include also other forms of political participation as dependent variable. Hence, we should be careful in generalizing these effects to other forms of political

participation. Second, the dependent variable was measured within two month after the referendum took place and we have only this single post-measure, meaning that we do not know how long this effect is valid and whether it might disappear with time.

Despite those limitations, this study can contribute to a better understanding of the effects of direct democratic decision-making on the local level. As direct democracy on the local level differs from direct democratic decision-making on the national level, the findings of this study cannot be transferred to direct democratic procedures in general. Nevertheless, as I expect these findings to be generalizable to local decision-making in other contexts where citizens are comparatively inexperienced with direct democracy, this study can provide important insights for both scholars and policymakers. It shows that involving the local community in decision-making can have an empowering effect on citizens that potentially extends beyond the actual referendum. From a normative point of view, this represents a positive finding, in times in which many citizens feel left out – for example about 18 percent of Europeans think that the political system does not allow people to have an influence on politics at all (ESS, 2014). Moreover, it seems that direct democratic involvement affects in particular the intention to engage of those citizens who are not familiar with political participation. Apparently, a local referendum can enlarge society's mobilisation potential beyond the 'usual suspects' and trigger future engagement among first-timers. This is a promising finding for citizens and activist in local communities but also for those local politicians and administrators who see initiatives like a referendum as a tool they can use to build a stronger, more participatory democracy at the local level. The current findings suggest that these positive effects also spill over into other forms of political engagement.

[ii] All respondents were first contacted by post, but they also had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire online using personalized login data that were distributed together with the postal survey.

[ii] I tested in an additional analysis among the voters, whether the effect only holds for those citizens who voted for the losing outcome. However, the vote choice has no significant effect on the probability to participate in future protest (see Appendix B).

[iii] Interviews were conducted in Dutch – the presented extracts were translated by the author.

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Appendix A

Measuring internal and external political efficacy

A factor analysis was conducted based on the following battery of efficacy items:

- 'I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics' (SELFQUAL)
- 'I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our society' (UNDERSTAND)
- 'I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people' (INFORMED)
- 'I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people' (PUBOFF)
- 'An average citizen does have an impact on politics and what the government is doing' (IMPACT)
- 'Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on' (COMPLEX)
- 'In election times, one party promises more than the other, but eventually, nothing happens anyway' (PROMISE)
- 'People like me don't have any say about what the government does' (NOSAY)
- 'I don't think public officials care much what people like me think' (NOCARE)

Respondents evaluated each statement on a scale than ranges from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Based on these answers, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted (see Table A1). In line with the literature the factor analysis reveals two dimensions of political efficacy (Niemi, Craig and Mattei, 1991). Only two items, IMPACT and COMPLEX have factor loadings lower than 0.6 and substantial cross-loadings on both factors. These items are therefore excluded from the analysis.

SELFQUAL, UNDERSTAND, INFORMED and PUBOFF load on the second factor that captures citizens' sense of internal efficacy, i.e. their belief about their own competence to understand politics and to participate effectively in it. Based on this result the items are used to construct a sum scale (Cronbach's α is 0.812; Eigenvalue 1.493; 36.63 per cent explained variance).

PROMISE, NOSAY and NOCARE load on the first factor which captures external political efficacy, i.e. citizens' beliefs about the responsiveness of political authorities and institutions. Also for external efficacy a sum scale was constructed (Cronbach's α is 0.858; Eigenvalue 3.004; 73.75 per cent explained variance).

Table A1: Exploratory factor analysis of the political efficacy scale

Indicator	**Factor 1** **External Efficacy**	**Factor 2** **Internal Efficacy**	**Uniqueness**
SELFQUAL	-0.113	**0.705**	0.469
UNDERSTAND	0.121	**0.721**	0.491
INFORMED	0.030	**0.751**	0.4112
PUBOFF	0.033	**0.700**	0.531
IMPACT	-0.496	0.138	0.623
COMPLEX	0.213	-0.213	0.689
PROMISE	**0.676**	0.080	0.470
NOSAY	**0.879**	-0.004	0.259
NOCARE	**0.874**	0.041	0.286

Note: Entries are the result of an exploratory factor analysis based on Eigenvalues and Promax rotation. Factor loadings > 0.6 in boldface.

Appendix B

Table B1. The effect of winning the referendum on protest intentions

	I	II	III	IV
Intercept	-0.857***	-2.711**	-0.848	-1.178
	(0.226)	(0.944)	(1.136)	(1.188)
Winner	0.516*	0.488	0.370	0.428
	(0.287)	(0.300)	(0.352)	(0.364)
Internal efficacy		0.347	0.228	0.068
		(0.202)	(0.259)	(0.270)
External efficacy		0.223	0.064	0.133
		(0.157)	(0.187)	(0.197)
Political Interest			0.203**	0.180*
			(0.101)	(0.104)
Satisfaction with			-0.253***	-0.194**
local democracy			(0.078)	(0.083)
Honest procedure			-0.179**	-0.169**
			(0.082)	(0.085)
Past protest				1.230***
				(0.390)
N	224	215	213	211
Pseudo R^2	0.011	0.026	0.132	0.171

Note: The dependent variable is the probability to intent to protest in the future. Entries are logit coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. Sign.: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Appendix C

To measure *social trust* inhabitants were asked to what degree they agreed with the following five statements (respondents answered on a scale ranging from 1 ‘completely disagree’ to 5 ‘completely agree’):

- People around here are willing to help their neighbours
- This is a close-knit neighbourhood
- People in this neighbourhood can be trusted
- People in this neighbourhood generally don’t get along with each other (reversed)
- Contacts between inhabitants in this neighbourhood are generally positive

Based on the answers a sum scale was constructed (Cronbach’s α is 0.856).

To measure *informal social control* inhabitants were asked to what degree they thought it would be likely that their neighbours would interfere in following four different scenarios (respondents answered on a scale ranging from 1 ‘very likely’ to 5 ‘very unlikely’):

- Children were skipping school and hanging out on a street corner
- Children were spray-painting graffiti on a local building
- Children were showing disrespect to an adult
- A fight broke out in front of their house

Based on the answers a sum scale was constructed (Cronbach’s α is 0.844).

Table C1: Social trust and informal social control before and after the referendum

	before the referendum	after the referendum	Difference
Social Trust	3.304	3.347	-0.043
Informal Social Control	2.982	2.926	0.056

Note: Sign.:*** p<0.01, ** p <0.05, * p<0.1

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on voters and potential future protesters

		Voted		
		No	Yes	Total
Intention to protest	No	206	146	352
	Yes	32	84	116
	Total	238	230	

Note: Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=468) = 33.411$, $p<.001$.

Table 2. The effect of direct democratic participation on protest intentions

	I	II	III	IV
Intercept	-1.862***	-4.224***	-2.699***	-2.881***
	(0.190)	(0.744)	(0.938)	(0.962)
Voted	1.309***	1.317***	1.272***	1.102***
	(0.234)	(0.245)	(0.264)	(0.271)
Internal efficacy		0.424**	0.433**	0.333*
		(0.151)	(0.188)	(0.193)
External efficacy		0.294*	0.099	0.162
		(0.124)	(0.150)	(0.156)
Political interest			0.075	0.064
			(0.065)	(0.066)
Good decision			0.159**	0.140*
			(0.071)	(0.074)
Satisfaction with			-0.160***	-0.125**
local democracy			(0.056)	(0.058)
Honest procedure			-0.263***	-0.242***
			(0.079)	(0.080)
Past protest				1.146***
				(0.317)
N	468	456	443	441
Pseudo R^2	0.065	0.088	0.151	0.176

Note: The dependent variable is the probability to intent to protest in the future. Entries are logit coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. Sign.: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3. Predicted probabilities of voters depending on their past engagement

		Voted	
		No	Yes
Protested in past year	No	0.105	0.262
		[0.065; 0.146]	[0.193; 0.330]
	Yes	0.270	0.527
		[0.135; 0.405]	[0.386; 0.669]

Note: Predicted probabilities based on Model IV (Table 2). 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. All covariates are held at the mean.