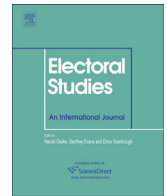




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Electoral Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/electstud

Education and support for representative, direct and stealth democracy[☆]

Hilde Coffé^{a,*}, Ank Michels^b^a Victoria University of Wellington, Political Science and International Relations Programme, Wellington 6140, New Zealand^b Utrecht University, School of Governance, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 June 2013

Received in revised form 20 January 2014

Accepted 26 March 2014

Available online 4 April 2014

Keywords:

Political decision-making

Direct democracy

Representative democracy

Stealth democracy

Education

ABSTRACT

Using data collected within the scope of a Dutch internet panel survey (LISS) in 2011, this study tracks public support for direct, stealth and representative democracy according to educational level. Our findings indicate that, in terms of *overall support* for each specific type of democracy, lower educated citizens are significantly more supportive of stealth and direct democracy than highly educated citizens. While the mean levels of support for representative democracy do not differ significantly between levels of education, multivariate OLS regression analyses show that lower educated citizens are noticeably more supportive of representative democracy once political efficacy, trust and satisfaction are introduced. When *contrasting* the different types of democracy directly with one another, we find that lower educated citizens have a greater tendency to prefer direct and (to a lesser extent) stealth democracy over representative democracy than higher educated citizens. Multivariate OLS regression analyses indicate that most of these educational gaps cease to be significant once the lower levels of political efficacy, trust and satisfaction of lower educated citizens are taken into account. Implications of these results for the debate on the functioning of democracy are discussed.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

A large body of research has found declining levels of satisfaction with the institutions and processes of representative democracy (e.g., Dalton, 2008; Kaase and Newton, 1995). It has also been documented that citizens do not feel represented by politicians and that elected officials have lost touch with ordinary people (Van Dijk and Coffé, 2011; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1998). Although these developments will not necessarily lead to a crisis of

democracy, they are viewed as a cause for concern and have resulted in discussions about ways to improve citizens' levels of political trust and satisfaction. Many reformists and scholars have called for various mechanisms of direct democracy to complement the existing form of representative democracy, including the use of local and national referendums and the direct election of local officials (e.g., Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Cain et al., 2006). The people, it is alleged, desire to have a greater voice in political decision-making processes.

Yet, the extent to which people actually desire more of a voice is an ongoing debate. Whereas some research investigating people's support for direct democracy has found some demand among citizens for more direct involvement (Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009; Bowler et al., 2007; Dalton et al., 2001; Donovan and Karp, 2006), others have questioned these conclusions. In particular, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001, 2002) have argued that

[☆] An earlier version of this paper was presented at research seminars at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (Political Science Department) and the Australian National University (School of Politics and International Relations).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: hilde.coffe@vuw.ac.nz (H. Coffé), a.m.b.michels@uu.nl (A. Michels).

public support for direct democracy is mainly due to a feeling of dissatisfaction with representative democracy, rather than to any actual desire to engage more in political decision-making processes. They argue that citizens have no desire for any greater involvement in political decision-making or providing more input to decision makers. Citizens would rather not know all the details of the decision-making process and prefer these processes not to be visible to them, a perspective that is captured by [Hibbing and Theiss-Morse \(2002\)](#) in the concept of *stealth democracy*. This concept refers to a form of democracy that stresses efficiency, less debate, less influence of partisanship interests, and a greater use of expert opinions in political decision-making processes. Thus, while direct democracy, as compared with representative democracy, entails a higher degree of involvement of ordinary citizens in the decision-making process, stealth democracy calls for less active citizen involvement.

In sum, the question of which type of democracy citizens would support remains, in particular since the research to date has focused mainly on one particular type of democracy (and in particular on direct democracy), as such lacking a comparative perspective between different types of decision-making processes or democracies (and thus ways of representation). In the present study, we focus on public support for different types of democracy: stealth, direct and representative democracy and investigate to what extent this support differs between groups with different levels of educational attainment. It is well known that education has a major influence on voting decisions and many political attitudes, with some even claiming a trend towards an *increasing* educational gap in political interest, attitudes and behaviour (e.g., [Bovens and Wille, 2010](#); [Gallego, 2007](#); [Stolle and Hooghe, 2011](#); [Stubager, 2010](#)). Education increases cognitive skills and feelings of citizen duty to participate, and less well-educated citizens are consistently found to be less likely to engage in politics and to be more distrustful and cynical about politics and politicians (e.g., [Bovens and Wille, 2010](#); [Kriesi et al., 2006](#); [Stubager, 2010](#)). Starting from these insights and relying on *political dissatisfaction* and *cognitive mobilization theories*, we will investigate to what extent education is linked to support for different types of democracy and to what extent these potential educational differences can be explained by differences in levels of political trust, political satisfaction and feelings of political efficacy. If different educational groups have different opinions about how democracy should preferably be organized, that might eventually have consequences for the legitimacy of democracy in particular because a legitimate democracy demands some sort of a common idea of what democratic decision making should entail.

To summarize, our study focuses on the following questions: (1) Descriptive: *To what extent are there educational differences in support for representative, direct and stealth democracy?* (2) Explanatory: *To what extent do educational differences in political trust, satisfaction and efficacy explain the impact of education on support for the different types of democracies?* To answer our research questions, we draw on original data collected at the end of 2011 within the scope of an ongoing representative Dutch

panel survey (LISS – Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences).

Our article is structured as follows. We first briefly introduce the different types of democracies considered in this study: representative, direct and stealth democracy. Next, we discuss theories to explain the link between levels of education and support for the different types of democracy and present our hypotheses. Thereafter, we provide a short description of our case and describe the decision-making process characteristic of the Netherlands. We then introduce our data and measurements, and follow with our analyses. Finally, we present a summary of our results and discuss the implications of our findings in the conclusion.

2. Theory

2.1. Representative, direct and stealth democracy

Representative democracy, which is founded on the principle of elected individuals representing the people, is the most common form of democracy in established Western societies. However, with citizens' growing feelings of lack of being represented and their declining levels of trust in politicians, political parties, and political institutions which are at the heart of the functioning of a representative democracy, representative democracy has been challenged during the last decades ([Dennis and Owen, 2001](#); [Van Dijk and Coffé, 2011](#)). Indeed, declining levels of political trust and satisfaction have resulted in a search for ways to bridge the gap between politics and the public ([Dalton, 2004](#); [Norris, 1999](#)).

A common suggestion has been to increase the possibilities for citizen involvement in decision-making processes and to introduce more *direct democracy*. Direct democracy refers to a decision-making process whereby voters play a more direct role in public policy. In recent decades, many Western countries have gained experience with various forms of direct democracy to complement the existing forms of representative democracy. These forms include various electoral and non-electoral mechanisms of citizen involvement in the political process, such as the use of national and local (binding or consultative) referendums, the direct election of local officials, and the use of different forms of collaborative governance or citizens' assemblies ([Michels, 2011](#); [Smith, 2009](#)).

Yet, the extent to which people actually desire more direct involvement in politics is a matter of ongoing debate. While several studies have found some demand among citizens for more direct involvement ([Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009](#); [Bowler et al., 2007](#); [Dalton et al., 2001](#); [Donovan and Karp, 2006](#)), others have questioned these conclusions. In particular, [Hibbing and Theiss-Morse \(2002\)](#) have argued that citizens in the US do not feel the need to provide much input to those who are assigned to make these decisions. These citizens are unhappy with the processes characteristic of representative democracy, including debating, compromising, and slowness, and would prefer not to know all the details about the decision-making process. This does not mean that people believe that no mechanism for government accountability is

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1051768>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1051768>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)