PATTERNS OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY? DETERMINING THE MAJORITARIAN AND CONSENSUAL TRAITS OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY WITH AN ANALYSIS OF 15 EU MEMBER STATES AND 183 REFERENDUMS HELD THERE BETWEEN 1990 AND 2012

STEFAN VOSPERNIK
University of Vienna, Austria

Keywords: direct democracy; majoritarian democracy; consensus democracy; political institutions; Lijphart's model of democracy;

Introduction

For centuries, the phenomenon of direct democracy has exerted a peculiar attraction to theorists and practitioners of politics alike. Unsurprisingly so, because it lies at the heart of the democratic principle: The participation of the people in the decision making process. Thus, it has played a pivotal role in political thought, from Aristotle to Schumpeter, from Rousseau to Barber. But while theoretical assumptions about the virtues and pitfalls of direct democracy abound, empirical evidence remains scarce and scattered. According to Grotz, the amount of general findings about the functioning of direct democracy in Europe is still „rather modest“ (2009: 387).

Most noticeably, direct democracy still has still to find its proper place in the framework of Arend Lijphart's “groundbreaking” (Schmidt 2002: 149) concept of democracies. In a way, Lijphart exemplifies the perplexity of many scholars when it comes to direct democracy. First, he considers referendums “the polar opposite” of consensual democracy (1977: 40). Later he postulates an incompatibility between referendums and the Westminster model, as they weaken the rule of the parliamentary majority (1991: 26). While acknowledging a consensual tendency of instruments like the Swiss popular initiative (1991: 45), he names direct democracy as a whole foreign to both the majoritarian and the consensus democracy (1991: 46). Some years later he reveals that he analysed the frequency of referendums for his book Democracies, but that there was no correlation with either of the two main dimensions, “which means that it indeed formed a separate third dimension by itself” (2000: 236). Finally, he comes to state that the referendum is a “majoritarian device” and the popular initiative an “antimajoritarian” one (1999: 230). Based on this finding, he lines out a way by which it could be possible to introduce direct democracy into his concept: “It may be necessary to first disaggregate referendums because these have both majoritarian and consensual characteristics as well as both first-dimension and second-dimension consensus characteristics” (2000: 236).

Although there have been some attempts to fill the gap in Lijphart's concept (Jung 1996, Vatter 2000, Vatter 2009, Vatter and Bernauer 2009, Bernauer/Giger/Vatter 2014), there is still “no definitive answer to the question of possible connections between direct democracy and the two basic dimensions of democracy” (Vatter 2009: 127/128). While Jung provides no empirical foundation for her theoretical findings, Vatter basically arrives at the same conclusion as Lijphart – that direct democracy forms a separate third dimension, correlating strongly with the type of cabinet government (2009: 149). The main weakness of his study is that he analyses direct democracy from a consensus democracy angle (138)¹, falling short of the initial claim to disaggregate referendums according to their majoritarian or consensual characteristics (128).

The connection between Lijphart's concept and direct democracy is therefore still to be established. This is the first and foremost aim of this article. To this end, the multifaceted phenomenon of direct democracy is being disaggregated around two extremes termed “governmental” and “oppositional”.

- 1 -
Second, it proposes a unique way to operationalise the institutions and practice of direct democracy. To this end, different values are calculated for the institutional setting and the practice (even for each referendum). In addition to their placement on the governmental-oppositional continuum, the significance, efficacy and frequency of direct democratic processes are taken into account. Third, it searches to test whether Lijphart's propositions are also valid with an arbitrarily selected sample of states, including eight new democracies he has not analysed at all.

Theoretical foundation

The tradition of direct democracy reaches back to the beginning of democracy itself. Still, the scientifical discussion about this phenomenon was largely confined to the realm of political thought deep into the second half of the 20th century. In spite of the proof provided by many modern constitutions, the notion of an incompatibility between direct and representative democracy persisted, leading a renowned scholar like Giovanni Sartori to claim even at the beginning of the 1990s that an integration of those “two forms of democracy” is impossible (1992: 280).

In this line of thought, direct democracy was portrayed as the antithesis to a representative government based on a system of checks and balances, minority protection and self-restraint. The controversial nature of many referendums, especially the misuse of this instrument by authoritarian rulers, seemed to substantiate this claim. The different functioning of direct democracy in Switzerland, where referendum and initiative constituted an effective restraint on majority rule, making majoritarian democracy “nearly impossible” (Möckli 1994: 281) was dismissed as an exceptional case.

This traditional view on direct democracy proved untenable in the 1970s, when governments across Europe began to lose their grip on the initiation and outcome of referendums. This was also the starting point for a more realistic assessment of direct democracy, based on their “functional properties” (Smith 1976). Smith’s typology (controlled or uncontrolled referendums with hegemonic or anti-hegemonic effect) set the tone for many theoretical and empirical studies on direct democracy that followed.

The knowledge about the workings of direct democracy has increased considerably over the last four decades. There has been a great array of case studies about particular referendums, direct-democratic institutions or the whole picture of direct democracy in a particular state. Comparative studies about referendums with a similar subject matter (EU accession, minority rights, taxation etc.) have been very popular, as well. There has been also an extensive research on the interaction between referendums and political parties, in particular (Budge 2001, De Vreese 2006, Hornig 2011).

But when it comes the whole picture, even the most laudable comparative endeavors end with the excuse that “every referendum has its own history and its own consequences” (Luthardt 1994: 18). Studies with a comparative focus (Butler/Ranney 1978 and 1994, Möckli 1994, Luthardt 1994, Gallagher/Uleri 1996, Setälä 1999, Auer/Bützer 2001, Mendelsohn/Parkin 2001, Qvortrup 2002) are well-researched and an interesting read, but they provide little systematic answers about the interplay between direct democracy and “the rest” of the political system.

And what about general theories about democracies? Well, the veto player approach takes account of direct democracy, although on a very high level of abstraction. According to Tsebelis, referendums “create one additional veto player in the decision making process: the people” (2002:
This statement reflects the long way democratic theory has travelled when it comes to referendums. From a threat to liberal government, they have evolved to one of the cornerstones of the checks and balances that constitute it. Still, an analysis of direct democracy based on the veto player approach would not lead us far. It treats all referendums equally, in spite of their different forms, initiators and functions. Furthermore, it does not provide such deep insight into the functioning of political systems as the multifaceted concept of Arend Lijphart.

**A comprehensive theory of democracy**

Three decades after its first presentation, Lijphart's dichotomy of majoritarian and consensus democracies is still the most influential approach in the comparative study of democracies. Lijphart has reaffirmed his findings recently in an updated edition of *Patterns of Democracies* (2012), while Vatter and Bernauer (2009) were able to do so for all 25 EU member states. However, there has also been manifold critique, especially concerning the second dimension, an “artificial” composition of variables (Müller-Rommel 2008: 86) with a shaky empirical basis once the five big federal states (Australia, USA, Germany, Switzerland and Canada) are excluded (Taagepera 2003: 10). Replications of Lijphart's study for Central and Eastern European countries (Fortin 2008, Roberts 2006) have found no correlation between the five variables of the federal-unitary dimension.

Nonetheless, the scope of this study will comprise both the executives-parties and the federal-unitary dimension, although with some minor changes. The central bank variable is omitted, due to the internationalisation of monetary politics, especially in the context of the European Monetary Union. Additionally, two variables of the first dimension are operationalised in a different way as in Lijphart's study. As to the cabinet type, only the percentage of one party cabinets is counted, not the average of one party and minimal winning cabinets. In regard to the executive dominance variable, I take account of some of the harsh critique (Müller-Rommel 2008, Tsebelis 2009) on the operationalisation. Therefore, the variable “cabinet life I” is supplemented by values based on the Parliamentary Powers Index of Fish and Kroenig (2009) and Döring's (2001) index of parliamentary agenda control. Interest group pluralism is operationalised in line with the study of Vatter and Bernauer (2009) on 25 EU member states.

The integration of the aspect of direct democracy into this concept is to be brought about with a disaggregation of this multifaceted phenomenon. This endeavour parts from the general observation that processes of direct democracy intervene with the circulation of power in modern democracies, described by Luhmann (1984: 148) and Habermas (1986: 399) as originating from the executive, binding the legislature and subsequently the people. Direct democracy may either reinforce the usual circulation or revert it into an idealistic one, originating from the people who bind the legislature and subsequently the executive. When used to reinforce the usual circulation of power, direct democracy is termed governmental, when used to revert it to the idealistic circulation of power, it is termed oppositional.

On the theoretical level, there is an obvious linkage between those two types of direct democracy and Lijphart's concept. As it strengthens the government vis-à-vis the opposition, the governmental type of direct democracy has clear majoritarian effects. In contrast, the oppositional type of direct democracy has consensual effects, as it forces the government to share its power with oppositional players. Therefore, I postulate the following two basic assumptions to be tested empirically in this study.

**H1:** The governmental type of direct democracy correlates with majoritarian political systems.

**H2:** The oppositional type of direct democracy correlates with consensual political systems.
In addition, the functioning of direct democracy and its interplay with particular institutions and actors of the political system will be further explored by 20 specific hypotheses.

H3: The frequency of referendums is lower in majoritarian democracies.
H4: Less use is made of governmental instruments of direct democracy in consensual democracies.
H5: A high frequency of oppositional processes of direct democracy is incompatible with majoritarian democracy.

H6: Governmental direct democracy correlates with one party cabinets.
H7: Oppositional direct democracy correlates with broad majority cabinets.
H8: In systems with one party cabinets, the practice of direct democracy has a strong oppositional tendency (based on the assumption of a higher percentage of referendums with an “anti-hegemonic” outcome)
H9: The likelihood of governmental defeats in referendums is in inverse proportion with the size of the governmental majority in parliament.
H10: The cabinet life is shorter, the bigger the difference between the general system type and the configuration of direct democracy is.
H11: Oppositional direct democracy correlates with a strong parliament.
H12: Oppositional direct democracy correlates with a fragmented party system.
H13: Governmental defeats are more likely to occur in systems with a corporatist structure.
H14: Oppositional direct democracy correlates negatively with power sharing in the federal-unitary dimension. (The assumption is that oppositional direct democracy compensates for those structures, like e.g. bicameralism)
H15: The more oppositional the practice of direct democracy, the lower the gains of the main opposition party at the following general elections.
H16: The performance of government and opposition parties in the referendum predicts the result of the forthcoming elections.
H17: Governmental processes of direct democracy are more likely to cause the fall of the sitting government than oppositional ones.
H18: The broader the parliamentary majority of the government, the less likely is the fall of the government after the referendum.
H19: The longer a government is in office, the more likely it is to lose a referendum.
H20: Governing parties have more difficulties to mobilise their vote potential than opposition parties.
H21: A strong oppositional practice of direct democracy correlates with low turnout.
H22: A high frequency of referendums correlates with low turnout.

Operationalisation of direct democracy

The main challenge of this study is the operationalisation of direct democratic processes. They are much more difficult to analyse as other institutions of the political system, as they lack continuity and are multifaceted in their initiation, form and function. Subsequently, the institutions and processes of direct democracy will be measured in a multidimensional way.

First, the institutions of direct democracy in a given political system are examined on a scale ranging from +1 (governmental) to -1 (oppositional). With the exception of non-binding initiatives and regional referendums, each institution of direct democracy is assigned a value according to the scheme below. The respective values are lowered by 0.2 points for constraints like high quorums, signature requirements or a limited topical scope of the referendum. These calculations constitute the so-called “base index” of direct democracy for the single institution or – cumulatively – the set of direct democratic institutions in the examined political system as a whole.
The highest values are assigned to those instruments that are considered to have the strongest impact on the decision making process, as they are initiated from outside the legislative arena (pure governmental referendums and citizens' initiatives). Mandatory referendums take an intermediary position. Strictly speaking, they are neutral, as they have no arbitrary initiator. The parliamentary majority only formally initiates them, having no other choice if it wants to pass the law in question. The opposition has no formal role in this process, but it benefits from the referendum, as it provides an opportunity to challenge the government. Therefore, mandatory referendums are coded mildly oppositional.

[Table 1. Base index of direct democracy]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referendum initiated by government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functionally governmental initiative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veto referendum initiated by government against the legislature</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum initiated by parliament</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum to circumvent a supermajority requirement in parliament</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Neutral” Referendum with solely legimatory character</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory referendum or oppositional constitutional referendum</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veto referendum initiated by opposition, upper chamber, subnational entities or other „veto players“</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veto referendum initiated by people</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppositional initiative</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the evaluation of the practice of direct democracy, three additional aspects are taken into account, the frequency, importance and efficiency of direct democratic processes. Each referendum is assigned individual values according the the importance and efficiency of the vote. The base value for the institution in question is multiplied by values for the importance (0.5 to 2) and efficiency (-1 to 1). The result is the so-called “practice value” of direct democracy for each process or – cumulatively – all processes in the examined political system together.

The use of two values for the description of direct democracy enables additional calculations, for example about the oppositional or governmental tendency of the direct democratic practice in a political system, by comparing the average base and practice value.

[Table 2. Practice index of direct democracy]

Effectiveness
- very effective (gov: vote won and implemented / opp: vote won or implemented) | 1
- intermediate (secondary functions such as removal of a divisive issue form the agenda (gov.), government stays under pressure (opp.) ) | 0.5
- ineffective (neither initiator nor adversary has an advantage) | 0
- counterproductive (vote strengthens position of the adversary) | -0.5
- inverse effect (for mandatory and neutral processes) | -1

Importance
- vote with consequences for the balance of power | 2
- topic of interest for the general public | 1
- topic of little interest for the general public | 0.5
- uncontroversial topic | 0.5
Research design and additional measurements

The theoretical framework is to be tested on a sample of similar cases. The obvious choice are the member states of the European Union, whose political systems are converging in the way they intensify their cooperation in a “ever closer” community. To enable a treatment of “old” and newly democratised member states on an equal footing, only the period after 1990 is subject of quantitative research. The most important criterion, however, is the occurrence of referendums during the examined period. We settle for a low barrier of two referendums from 1990 to 2012 in order to achieve a broad sample of states.

15 EU member states meet those requirements, among them eight newly democratised states. In those states, 183 referendums were carried out between 1990 and 2012. The sample comprises Italy (54 referendums), Ireland (22), Denmark (5), Portugal (3), France (3), Sweden (2), Malta (2); Slovenia (21), Lithuania (20), Slovakia (15), Latvia (10), Hungary (8), Poland (7), Romania (7) and Estonia (4).

To gain most information for the quantitative research, all political systems are analysed in-depth. In particular, the genesis and effects of each of the 183 direct democratic processes is scrutinised. For every case where such information was available, the positions of the political parties, according to their role in the direct democratic process (initiator or opponent, government or opposition), are ascertained. The performance of the parties at the referendum is then compared with their results at the following general elections. Additionally, the tenure of the government (in days), the timing of the referendum (early or late in the legislative period) and the turnout (in relation to the preceding elections) are analysed. On a general level, it is examined whether the government collapsed after the referendum or it came to a change in government after the next election.

Country studies

*Italy* is a consensual democracy on institutional level, but not much so on behavioral one. Due to the strong polarisation of the party system, the willingness of the protagonists to cooperate is limited, resulting in frequent blockages. This situation is mirrored by the functioning of direct democracy. Usually there is no genuine political competition around referendum initiative. The opponents either choose a strategy of “if you can't beat them, join them” or appeal for a boycott of the vote. From the four instruments (consultative referendum, optional constitutional referendum, abrogative referendum by 500.000 voters and abrogative referendum by five regional councils), the third is by far the most important. In the examined period, there were 49 abrogative referendums by voters, 3 abrogative referendums by regions and 2 constitutional referendums. Only four referendums (of 54) were counted as governmental, and they were all unsuccessful. In all, just 19 referendums were successful. The elite consensus was prevailing during the 1990s, when the biggest parties of government and opposition usually joined forces against referendum challenges by smaller parties. But after 2005, this has never been the case again. Most importantly, there is strong evidence that successful referendums are detrimental for the governing parties. After successful referendums, the biggest party of government lost 9 percentage points at the subsequent elections, compared with a loss of 6.25 percentage points on average. Still, the effects of direct democratic processes on the balance of power are mediated by a highly formalised and lengthy procedure. Referendums have only limited value as “weapon” of the opposition, as they are usually held a year after their initiation. This may be the main reason why there is no widespread use of this at first sight quite “cheap” power instrument by the opposition.

*Ireland* is half-way between majoritarian and consensual democracy in both dimensions. Its political system is based on a Westminster-style institutional setting, but with significant adoptions,
most importantly a PR election system. One of the main factors limiting the concentration of power in the executives-parties dimension is the existence of mandatory referendums. While the parliamentary veto referendum has remained a dead letter because of the high requirements for its initiation, the mandatory constitutional referendum has turned out to be an effective brake on government power. It fosters consensual characteristics in three ways. First, by protecting the constitution from a change by the government of the day. Second, by inducing the government to seek a broad consensus for constitutional changes in order to minimise the chances of defeat. Third, by strengthening smaller parties that profit from the void left by the elite consensus in referendum campaigns. During the examined period, there were 22 mandatory referendums on changes to the constitution. For analytical purposes, they were counted as oppositional. Subsequently, the adversaries of the proposition figured as quasi initiators. The elite consensus was extraordinarily high (91 percent). On average, the quasi initiators were outnumbered by 52.1 percentage points. Still, they achieved a success rate of 22.3 per cent. Not surprisingly, the government won all referendums that were supported by every parliamentary party, although in one case only by the slightest margin. On the other hand, the government lost both referendum challenges that were backed by the main opposition party. This marks the continuation of a remarkable pattern, ranging back to Fianna Fail’s attempts to change the electoral law in 1959. Whenever it was not able or willing to secure the support of the main opposition party, the government lost the referendum – in seven cases between 1959 and 2013. On the other hand, a high frequency of referendums seems to benefit the main party of government. The higher the number of referendums in the legislative period, the better the main government party fared at the following elections (correlation 0.568*). For the main opposition party, the respective negative correlation is even more significant (-0.808**). This party is in an ungrateful position, as it is in most cases forced to back the government proposal to preserve its credibility (as former and coming government party), thus not being able to exploit a possible government defeat (which would be attributed to the smaller opposition parties) neither really profiting from a possible success (which would be attributed to the government exclusively). Finally, there is a strong negative correlation (-0.887**) between the breadth of the government majority and the number of referendums. In fact, most referendums took place under a minority government.

Denmark combines consensual traits in the first dimension with majoritarian ones in the second. One of the noticeable factors is the prevalence of minority coalition governments. As to direct democracy, Denmark has the longest continuous tradition of referendums, with the mandatory constitutional referendum being in force since 1915. It is a strong conservative device, as it is combined with an approval quorum of 40 per cent of the electorate. There are two special forms of mandatory referendums, on the change of the voting age and international treaties, as well as an optional law referendum triggered by a third of the members of parliament, all of them with a 30 per cent quorum for the rejecting majority. Finally, the parliamentary majority can call a consultative referendum. The most important device is the international treaty referendum, used four times on EU matters. In addition, there was one constitutional referendum. No use was made of neither the governmental nor the oppositional optional referendum. In the case of the latter, this seems surprising, as one could assume that there may be ample opportunities for the opposition to test laws at a referendum. But in the Danish context with a strong role of the opposition in the decision-making process, there is no need to use the veto referendum. Its mere existence compels the government to make some concessions that the opposition is eager to accept instead of playing all-or-nothing in the referendum arena. As in Ireland, there is a strong elite consensus. All five referendums saw the main government and the main opposition party on the same side. On average, the quasi initiators were inferior by 59.02 percentage points. Still, two referendums (on the Maastricht treaty 1992 and on Euro accession 2000) were lost. There is a nearly perfect negative correlation between the political strength of the defending side and their performance in the
The stronger it is “on paper”, the bigger is the gap between this theoretical strength and the actual one. On average, the quasi initiators exceed their theoretical strength by 49.01 percentage points, which is the highest value of all examined countries. The Danish example provides also strong evidence that new governments fare better at referendums, as there is a nearly perfect negative correlation (-0.967**) between the tenure of the government (in days) and the percentage of yes-votes for the four EU referendums. Both successful referendums took place within 130 days after the inauguration of a new government, while the lost ones were carried out by governments with 538 and 932 days in office, respectively. Generally speaking, the Danish experience strongly supports the concept of referendums as a “democratic safety valve” (Resnick 1994). While the voters turn their back massively at the power elite at referendums, they tend to stick to it at elections. Danish governments are very stable and long-lasting (the Social Democrats governed from 1993 to 2001, the Liberals from 2001 to 2011), without strong and lasting surges for smaller opposition parties.

France belongs to the strongest majority democracies in the sample and it also is the only genuinely presidential one, at times. The French political system is peculiar, as it swings between two different regime types. When presidential and parliamentary majority are concurrent, there is an extreme concentration of power in the president. When the president is not backed by the parliamentary majority, the regime is semi-presidential, in which the president is confined to his reserved domain of foreign and defence affairs. Another important trait of the French political system is the weakness of parliament. In fact, the subordination of the legislative under the executive is even stronger as in the classical Westminster system. There is no universal legislative competence of parliament, whose agenda is determined by the government. Consequently, the legislative has no role to play in direct democratic processes. The referendum is a presidential prerogative that comes in three different forms, the legislative referendum, the optional constitutional referendum as alternative to a higher parliamentary quorum and the mandatory referendum on EU accessions. The presidential regime of the Fifth republic was literally and metaphorically borne by the referendum device. Now that the preeminence of the president is established, there seems to be no use for the referendum anymore. In fact, there were only three referendums in the examined period, of which the last one (on the EU constitutional treaty 2005) can be considered “politically obligatory” (Morel 2007: 1058), meaning that the president was obviously forced to call it. Still, all referendums are coded as governmental. In each case there was an elite consensus, and the yes-side was stronger by 31.36 percentage points “on paper”. From this viewpoint, the yes side fared worse in the successful Maastricht referendum as in the clearly lost EU Constitution referendum. However, in every referendum the adversaries reached a significantly better result as could have been expected from their party strength (+28.38 percentage points on average). But there is no indication that they benefited at the following elections. On average, the adversaries (small opposition parties) lost 3.12 percentage points. While no referendum has lived up to the expectations of the president – the nearly lost one (1992) weakened the president in the run-up to parliamentary elections, the clearly won one (2002) was tainted by a weak turnout and the lost one (2005) doomed the presidency of the incumbent – there were also no lasting effects on the balance of power or party system. The referendum may not be the obvious governmental device anymore, but there is no indication that it would temper the majoritarian characteristics of the French political system.

Portugal is one of the Southern European majoritarian democracies that emerged in the third wave of democratisation. This group departs from the Westminster model in two important aspects, which is their PR electoral system and the well protected constitution. The most remarkable feature is the transition from a multi-party system to a two-party system at the end of the 1980s, which took place without change in the electoral system. In contrast to other younger democracies, direct democracy did not play any role in the political transition of Portugal. As in Italy, the push for direct democracy
came from center-right parties, a demand that was quashed by the dominant left-wing parties in their fear that the achievements of the revolution could be annulled with referendums. It took until 1989 that the then conservative government was able to cajole the weakened socialists to a constitutional revision that stipulated the introduction of the optional law referendum, initiated by either the government or the parliamentary majority. Some years later, the socialist government added a mandatory referendum on the regionalisation. The governmental nature of the law referendum is mediated by the fact that it can be petitioned by the parliamentary opposition or 75,000 voters on one side, and that the president is free to refuse a referendum proposal of either parliament or government. Furthermore, no referendum is possible on core legislative issues. All three referendums were carried out under a socialist government that tried to solve divisive issues by delegating them to the voters. In no case, there was an elite consensus. Two referendums (on abortion and regionalisation 1998) were lost, one (on abortion 2005) was won. There is a perfect negative correlation between referendum and subsequent election success. A couple of months after the lost referendums, the government was returned by the voters with an enforced majority. After the successful referendum, the government lost the elections. In general, the bipolar nature of referendums lends support to the two-party-dominance. However, small opposition parties profited from the divisions within the main political forces in both abortion referendums. The first referendum was an important factor for the emergence of a new leftist party, the BE, while the officially neutral position of the conservative PSD in the second one contributed to the spectacular gains of its smaller partner CDS-PP in the following elections.

**Sweden** combines consensual traits in the first dimension with pronounced majoritarian ones in the second dimension. It is a centralised state with a unicameral legislative, a flexible constitution and a weak judicial review. As in other Scandinavian states, minority governments are prevalent. Only four years of the 22-year period examined saw a majority government, on average the governments had a 45.15 per cent parliamentary support. The absence of a governmental majority entails an important role for parliament in the decision-making process. As to direct democracy, it has a long tradition in Sweden, but it was designed in a way that should preclude any disruptions to the existing balance of power. The referendum is an exclusive prerogative of the parliamentary majority and it is of consultative nature only. The optional constitutional referendum is a useless device, as it offers no additional value to the parliamentary process of constitutional revision. As with all referendums that took place before, also both referendums during the examined period (EU accession 1995 and Euro adoption 2003) had the main function of deciding a contentious issue that posed a threat to the cohesion of the socialdemocratic government. In both cases, there was an elite consensus, with the main conservative opposition party being more split in the matter as the government. In numerical terms, the pro-side had an advantage of 56.2 percentage points on average. The first referendum was won with a bare majority, the second lost with a decisive one. The difference between the theoretical and actual strength of both sides was 61.05 percentage points in the EU referendum and 58.35 percentage points in the Euro referendum. As in other countries, the government party fared worse electorally after the successful referendum as after the unsuccessful one (-9 vs. -5 percentage points).

**Malta** represents the closest approximation to the Westminster type of majoritarian government in the sample. It features a two-party-system, one-party majority cabinets, a high executive dominance and a pluralistic interest group system. In the second dimension, the rigid constitution is the only outlier. Surprisingly, the set of direct democratic institutions is slightly oppositional. In addition to the optional consultative referendum initiated by the parliamentary majority, there is an mandatory referendum for two special cases (the change of the legislative period and the divorce law) and an abrogative referendum on the initiative of ten percent of the electorate. This strong oppositional device does not really fit into a majoritarian system, but it has done it as little harm as the PR
electoral system has to the nearly perfect two party system. In fact, the existence of an extremely stable duopol in the electorate has discouraged the opposition of the day to seek a referendum. Collecting the signatures of ten percent of the voters would be too costly an exercise to just overthow a law instead of concentrating all efforts on an eventual election victory that would allow to annul all possible laws with the stroke of a feather. In addition, there is an attendance quorum of 50 per cent of the electorate, which under the circumstances of the highly concentrated party system allows the adversarial party to derail the whole exercise just by calling for abstention. Understandably, the abrogative referendum has not been used at all since its introduction two decades ago. The optional referendum has been used twice, but with different functions. The EU accession referendum (2004) was an classical governmental exercise, the Divorce referendum (2011) an oppositional one, as it was forced upon the conservative government. Both were highly competitive – the difference in the strength of the two sides was only 3.2 percentage points – and in both cases the stronger side “on paper” carried the day. They were also highly effective, as in both cases the initiators prevailed. And there were also direct consequences for the balance of power in the representative arena. After the EU referendum, the conservative government rode to an electoral success in a snap election, as the opposition had announced to reverse the EU accession if it won. The defeat at the Divorce referendum accelerated the centrifugal tendencies in the conservative government and ultimately led to its downfall and resounding defeat at the general elections in March 2013.

Slovenia stands out among the newly democratised countries of Central and Eastern Europe as the one that conforms best with Lijphart's archetype of a consensual democracy. The only deviation is the absence of federal structures, due to the smallness of the country. As in other countries of the region, the communist legacy translates in a decidedly idealistic conception of democracy that puts strong emphasis on the central role of the parliament in the decision-making process. Slovenia scores highest in the Parliamentary Powers Index. The legislative does not only appoint the head of government, but also the cabinet, after hearings with each designated minister. A positive vote of the parliament is necessary to sack or appoint a minister. This democratic idealism is reflected in the important role that is assigned to instruments of direct democracy. Three oppositional players (40,000 voters, a third of the MPs and the upper house) may demand a referendum. A law referendum or consultative referendum may also be called for by the parliamentary majority. Revisions of the constitution may be submitted to a referendum if a third of the MPs demand so. Of the 21 referendums that took place during the examined period, three were consultative referendums and 18 legislative referendums (7: parliamentary opposition, 7: voters, 2: upper house, 2: coalition MPs). From a functional viewpoint, 15 referendums were oppositional, five governmental and one (the uncontroversial EU referendum) neutral. In just 9.53 per cent of the referendums, there was an elite consensus. 86.7 per cent of all oppositional referendums were successful, but only 60 per cent of the governmental ones. The conservative opposition fared best, as it won all of their six referendums. However, these results came at a price, namely a very low turnout. On average it was 30.97 percentage points lower than the turnout of the preceding elections. While the opposition was able to mobilise nearly all of their usual voters (the difference between the theoretical and actual strength at the referendum was -0.9 percentage points), the government parties fared far worse (-18.73 percentage points). The Slovenian experience also supports the assumption that a government is more likely to be on the losing side of the referendum the longer it has been in office (correlation 0.528*). There is a certain destabilising effect of referendums on the government. On two occasions (2000 and 2011), governments fell after referendum defeats. The frequency of referendums in a legislative period correlates strongly with gains for the main opposition party at the following election (0.777**). But it is worth noting, however, that the referendum-induced downfalls of governments did not pay off for the conservative opposition. In both cases, left-wing parties won the election. Thus, the referendum is a double-edged sword for the opposition.
Generally, the Slovenian example provides strong evidence for the interconnection of consensual democracy and oppositional direct democracy. This is confirmed by the fact that the election winners strive for broad coalitions (the average government support in parliament is 55.8 per cent) in order to minimise the disruptive effects of oppositional referendums.

**Lithuania** mixes traits of consensual (fragmented party system, strong parliament, coalition governments, rigid constitution and strong judicial review) and majoritarian democracy (electoral system, pluralistic interest group system, unitarism and unicameralism). The undecided nature of the Lithuanian political system is underscored by the power balance between president and parliament that use their strong prerogatives on expense of the government. Direct democracy gained a prominent place in the Lithuanian constitutional order during the fight for independence from the Soviet Union. To put the legitimacy of the votes beyond any doubt, the fathers of the Lithuanian constitution opted for a prohibitive validity quorum of 50 per cent of all eligible voters. Although it is obviously out of reach in a “normal” political surrounding, this quorum is still in place for the mandatory referendum on core provisions of the constitution. For the optional referendum (on demand of 300,000 voters or resolution of the parliament), the validity quorum was lowered to 33 percent. Both initiators can now also opt for a – formally – consultative referendum with a participation quorum of 50 per cent of the electorate. This quorum applies also to the new mandatory referendum on sovereignty transfer that was introduced on the occasion of the EU accession referendum. Lithuania is an extraordinary case not only because of the high number of referendums (19), but also because of their great variety. Nine referendums were demanded by 300,000 voters, of which one was governmental – the rare case of a governmental referendum by initiative in Europe. Five were legislative referendums by the parliament, of which one was oppositional. There were two consultative referendums by the parliament, of which one was oppositional too. In addition, there were four referendums coded as neutral (two “state building” votes, one constitutional referendum and the EU accession referendum). Due to the high quorums, only 25 per cent of the referendums were successful. No governmental referendum was successful, but all neutral ones. Their neutral character is underscored by the fact that the result resembled the theoretical strength of both sides, in spite of the extraordinary imbalance. The initiators had an advantage of 58.3 percentage points on paper, but scored only -1.7 percentage points lower as expected. The referendum device is being monopolised by the political parties. In spite of several attempts, there has been no valid initiative since 1994. Still, there were two oppositional referendums afterwards. One was allowed by the government for tactical reasons, the other one was forced upon the government shortly before the elections after the opposition joined ranks with some defectors from the coalition. In no other country, direct democracy has such an obvious electoral purpose as in Lithuania. In 1996 and 2008, the government put popular topics on the ballot to boost its chances for another term. Before the 2000 and 2004 elections, newly established parties launched populist initiatives. And in 2012, the opposition tried to lift its profile with a referendum at election time. As in Denmark, fresh governments tend to fare better at referendums. Only one of seven referendums held simultaneously with elections had the main governmental party on the winning side. Of the 13 referendums held during the first 1000 days of tenure, only one ended with a governmental defeat. The referendum result also predicts the electoral success of the initiators. The better they fared in mobilising their voters in the referendum, the bigger their gains at the following elections (correlation 0.792**).

**Slovakia** displays a mixture of pronounced majoritarian (cabinet type, unicameralism) and consensual (corporatism, fragmentation of the party system) traits. The three core institutions of the political system (parliament, president and government) are well balanced. The president appoints the prime minister, who then has to be positively elected by an absolute majority in parliament. The legislative has the last say in all important appointments, a universal legislative competence and full
agenda control. Direct democracy has its roots paradoxically in the quest to prevent a popular vote against the independence of Slovakia. While the new Slovak constitution introduced a popular referendum, it also stipulated a two thirds majority for the integration of Slovakia into another state (namely Czechoslovakia, which was about to be dissolved by an elite accord and against the will of an important part of the population). In all, there are four referendum types: the optional parliamentary referendum, the mandatory referendum on the membership in a confederation of states, the optional popular referendum (350,000 voters) and the popular initiative (350,000 voters). All of them have a 50 per cent participation quorum. In the examined period, there were 15 referendums, ten initiatives (one of which was governmental) and five parliamentary referendums (one oppositional, one neutral). There was no optional popular referendum, and also the mandatory referendum remained a dead letter. Only one referendum – on EU membership 2003 (neutral) – was valid, all the others failed the participation quorum, including two referendums that were held simultaneously with general elections. On average, the turnout was 44.8 percentage points lower than at the preceding elections, the lowest value of all examined states. But material success does not seem to be the main goal of the initiators. In two cases (1994 and 2010), they stuck to their propositions (against privatisation and political privileges, respectively) in spite of the fact that parliament had already met most of their demands. Those initiatives were highly effective from an electoral point of view, as the initiators (newly established parties) scored spectacular electoral results riding the wave of populist referendum campaigns. The elite consensus is quite high (46 per cent), due to the common position of government and opposition against the six-fold anti privileges referendum in 2010. As in other countries, governmental initiators have a serious mobilisation problem. On average, the yes-votes were 18.3 percentage points lower than the theoretical electoral strength of the supporting parties. On the other hand, oppositional initiators exceeded their theoretical strength by 8.2 percentage points. Generally speaking, there is a highly significant negative correlation between the electoral strength of the initiators and their ability to mobilise this potential (-0.784**). The higher the electoral strength, the more negative the relation between potential and actual percentage of supporting votes in the referendum. Also in Slovakia, the tenure of the government raises the chances of the opposition to succeed in the referendum (0.674**). There is a pronounced negative correlation between the frequency of referendums in a legislative period and the electoral success of the main party of government (-0.896**). Summing up, it is hard to discern any beneficial effects of direct democracy in Slovakia. The misuse and disrespect for the referendum device by political parties seems to deepen the alienation of the electorate from politics. Instead of fostering the cooperation between the parties, referendums exacerbate their differences and conflicts.

Latvia scores lowest in executive dominance and highest in the party fragmentation. As many other new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, it features a pluralistic interest group system, a rigid constitution, unitarism and unicameralism. Not only is the Latvian parliament one of the strongest, it also lacks an effective counterpart on the executive side. Both the president and the government (“cabinet of ministers”) are dependent on the legislative, by which they are elected with simple majority. The party system is not only fragmented, but highly volatile, which translates in low government stability. The average cabinet duration is 0.9 years. However, there was no complete turnover during the last two decades, due to the important role of Russian-speaking opposition parties that are continuously excluded from government. In this regard, Latvia displays a similar pattern as the First Italian Republic (1948-94). Concerning direct democracy, Latvia is a very interesting case, as it has an institutional setting modeled after the disreputed Weimar constitution. In addition to the popular initiative there are is also an optional popular referendum with two subtypes – either initiated by the president or a third of the MPs. In all three cases, the signatures of ten per cent of the electorate are necessary for a referendum. The participation quorum is flexible (half of the turnout at the preceding parliamentary election). For popular initiatives on the
dissolution of parliament the quorum is higher (two thirds of the turnout). While referendums on the revision of core provisions of the constitution feature the same participation quorum as usual referendums, there is a 50 percent approval quorum for popular initiatives on constitutional matters. No quorum is prescribed for the two governmental types, the presidential referendum on the dissolution of parliament and the parliamentary referendum on EU treaties. In the examined period, ten referendums took place, four popular referendums (one governmental, one oppositional and two presidential), two constitutional initiatives (oppositional), one presidential referendum on the dissolution of parliament (governmental) and two referendums called by parliament (independence 1991, EU accession 2003). In a third of the cases, there was an elite consensus. Only three referendums, none of them oppositional, were successful. However, in three additional cases the intentions of the initiators were satisfied by respective acts before the referendum to discourage participation. In a fourth case, an unexpectedly strong showing at the referendum induced the governing parties to enact the proposition in a watered-down version. In general, Latvian referendums are highly competitive and replicate by and large the electoral balance of power. On average, the political strength of the initiators was 11.4 percentage points lower than that of the adversaries. The initiators mobilised slightly better (+8.6 percentage points) as the adversaries (-3.7 percentage points), and there are no big differences between governmental and oppositional processes. There is evidence that direct democracy stabilises governmental parties (1998), fosters the establishment of new oppositional parties (2011) and weakens big opposition parties (2012). The main beneficiary, however, was the president. All three presidential referendums were successful, strengthening the position of the institutionally weak head of state. Latvia provides some interesting insight into the interplay between consensual democracy and direct democracy. First, there is a significant negative correlation between the breadth of the government and governmental defeat at the referendum (-0.706*). In fact, the only governmental defeat took place under a minority government in 1998. Second, there is a nearly perfect correlation between the frequency of referendums and the electoral result of the initiators (0.931**). On average, the initiators gained 8.8 percentage points at the following elections. In contrast to other states, direct democracy entails no alleviating effects for the main government party which lost 10 percentage points on average. This may be related to the ineffectiveness of oppositional initiatives.

Hungary is a consensual democracy with some pronounced majoritarian traits, mainly a disproportional electoral system and a concentrated party system. As the Italian one, the Hungarian political system is characterised by the confrontation of protagonists that are institutionally forced to cooperate. The strong role of parliament and high number of issues that are decided by a two thirds majority strengthen the role of the opposition, as does direct democracy. There is a popular initiative and a popular referendum on demand of 200.000 citizens, in addition to the optional parliamentary referendum. All three devices have a quorum (participation of 50 percent of the eligible voters until 1997, approval of 25 percent of the electorate until 2012). The practice of direct democracy is highly oppositional. There were six popular initiatives, all of which were oppositional and two parliamentary referendums that are coded as neutral (NATO and EU accession). Only in those two cases there was an elite consensus (25 percent). The referendum processes were highly competitive and replicated the electoral power balance. On average, the initiators had an electoral advantage of +8.1 per cent. Their mobilisation success was +3.1 per cent, the mobilisation of the adversaries -7.1 per cent. The overall success rate is at 62.5 per cent, with half of all oppositional initiatives being successful. The outcome of the referendum had a strong predictive value for the election result. Governmental defeats correlate negatively with the result of the main governmental party (-0.919**). There is also a strong negative correlation between the frequency of referendums and the breadth of government. The number of referendums in a legislative period was lower, the bigger the governmental majority in parliament was (-0.849**). When only the six oppositional referendums are examined, there is a nearly perfect correlation between the referendum success and
the result of the main opposition party at the following election (+0.996**). After their referendum failure in 2004, the conservative opposition also lost the 2006 elections, while it scored a resounding electoral victory in 2010 after a threefold referendum success in 2008. In this regard, Hungary contradicts the experience of other states where successful referendum initiators tend to fare worse at the following elections. As in many other countries, political parties control referendum devices. Only one referendum (on double citizenship for Hungarians abroad 2004) had no party as leading initiator.

Poland falls to the majoritarian side on cabinet type, electoral system and interest group system, but features a fragmented party system, low executive dominance and important consensual traits in the second dimension (bicameralism, decentralisation, strong judicial review, rigid constitution). Apart from Lithuania, it is the only new democracy with a semi-presidential regime. The president has an important veto power in the legislative process, but – due to the mandatory parliamentary vote on the new government – only limited influence on the executive. The government has important tools to exert pressure on parliament, e.g. by dissolving the legislative when it fails to adopt the budget. With the exception of the optional constitutional referendum (demanded by 1/5 of the MPs) that replaced the mandatory constitutional referendum in 1997, there are only controlled types of referendum. Either the parliament or the president (the latter with the support of the upper house) may call for an optional referendum that is regulated by a 50 per cent participation quorum. In addition, parliament may call for an optional referendum on international treaties to circumvent the two thirds majority for their adoption. Also in this case the participation of at least 50 per cent of the eligible voters is necessary for a valid result. Seven referendums have taken place in the examined period. One was mandatory (new constitution 1997), one was initiated by the president in opposition to the government. Remarkably, in all seven cases there was an elite consensus. Still, the effectiveness is very low. Only one referendum was successful from the viewpoint of the initiators (quasi initiators in the case of the mandatory constitutional referendum). The quorum was met only in one of six cases, namely the EU accession referendum. This comes as no surprise, as the average turnout at parliamentary elections is below the participation quorum of 50 per cent. The referendums were highly competitive (the initiators are -1.3 percentage points weaker than the adversaries) and also the results conform with the electoral strengths on paper (+0.7 percentage points for the initiators and -2 percentage points for the adversaries).

Romania features strong consensus democracy characteristics. Importantly, it stands out together with Poland as the newly democratised country with markedly consensual traits in the federal-unitary dimension. But as in Italy, the conflictual behaviour of the institutional protagonists exerts an majoritarian push on the system. Furthermore, the executive dominance is somewhat underrated if calculated only according to the government duration. In fact, Romania has one of the weakest parliaments of all examined states, being regularly circumvented by governmental decrees. In Romania, the prevalence of minority cabinets has a totally different meaning as in Scandinavian countries. While the absence of a governmental majority strengthens the parliament as institutional player there, the existence of minority governments is a proof for the weakness of legislative scrutiny over the executive in Romania. As in France, the president has the exclusive right to initiate optional referendums. He may be recalled from office by a parliamentary referendum. Finally, there is a mandatory constitutional referendum. All referendum types are subject to a participation quorum of 50 percent. Seven referendums have taken place during the examined period, of which two were of constitutional nature. Three were initiated by the president (one of which was oppositional in nature), twice there was a vote on the impeachment of the president. The referendums were highly competitive (strength of initiators compared to adversaries: -1.2 percentage points), with no big imbalances in terms of mobilisation (+5.4 percentage points for the initiators, +3.3 percentage points for the adversaries). In 29 per cent of all cases there was an elite
consensus. 29 per cent of the referendums were successful. With the exception of two constitutional referendums, all votes were revolving around the person of Traian Basescu. His political adversaries tried to remove him twice. While a majority of voters supported him in 2007, he survived the second impeachment attempt in 2012 only because of the unmet quorum. In 2007 and 2009, he successfully used the referendum device to boost his electoral chances by popular reform proposals. This helped him to form a presidential majority in parliament that lasted up to the second impeachment referendum in 2012. In many respects, the practice of direct democracy in Romania resembles the one at the beginning of the Fifth French republic, when Charles de Gaulle used the referendum device to consolidate and expand his power.

**Estonia** has an intermediary position between the more majoritarian Lithuania and the more consensual Latvia. This holds true for the party system, the executive dominance, the electoral system and the interest group pluralism. However, it is the most majoritarian Baltic state in terms of cabinet type. In the second dimension, only the flexible constitution stands out. In the Estonian political system, parliament plays an pre-eminent role. Just as in Slovenia, it may elect the prime minister without a formal proposal by the president. In the light of negative experiences with popular initiatives and referendums in the interwar period, instruments of direct democracy were all but removed from the Estonian constitution. There is a mandatory referendum on core provisions of the constitution and an optional one to circumvent a parliamentary supermajority in constitutional matters. Parliament may call for an optional referendum, but this would be ill-advised to do so. The constitutions stipulates that parliament is automatically dissolved if its proposal is rejected by the voters. Four referendums have taken place in Estonia during the examined period. One was governmental, one neutral, one oppositional and one obligatory. 75 per cent of the referendums were successful. The initiators had an advantage of 14.8 percentage points and were also better at mobilising (+7.6 percentage points, adversaries: +1 percentage points). No significant effects on the interaction between parties or the institutional protagonists were noted.

**Comparative analysis**

In the last and most important step of the study, the quantitative data collected is analysed in a cross-sectional comparative manner. The main goal is to answer the question whether there is a connection between the two types of direct democracy and Lijphart's dichotomy of majoritarian and consensus democracies.

**New Patterns of democracy**

A necessary side-effect of this endeavour is some new evidence on Lijphart's theory. This is even more important, as this study includes eight countries that were not part of Lijphart's comparative study. As stated above, the applicability of Lijphart's theory to those newly democratised countries has been put into doubt. Additionally, this study provides an opportunity to test the performance of Lijphart's scheme in a restricted time frame (1990 to 2012) and in an arbitrarily composed group of countries that have been hand-picked according to their practice of direct democracy.

As for the countries that have already been examined by Lijphart, the study shows a remarkable stability of the findings during the time covered. The big exception is Portugal, which has moved from a moderate consensus democracy into the group of strong majoritarian democracies, just behind France. On the other end of the scale, Denmark is still the most consensual country.
**Table 3: Lijphart’s Patterns of Democracy newly calculated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Executives-Parties Dimension</th>
<th>Federal-Unitary Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-96 (orig. variables)</td>
<td>90-2012 (adapted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90-2012 (adapted)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>-0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:**
In accordance with the indices of direct democracy, the signs of Lijphart’s variables have been reversed. Low values characterise consensus democracies, high values majoritarian ones. The executive-parties dimension has been calculated twice for the period of 1990 to 2012: Once with the original variables of Lijphart and once with adapted variables for executive dominance and cabinet type. As for the federal-unitary dimension, the variable central bank independence was omitted.

**Figure 1: Two-dimensional conceptual map**

![Two-dimensional conceptual map]
Also the main correlations of Lijphart's study remain intact in this arbitrarily selected group of countries. The results of a factor analysis (varimax rotation) state a strong correlation between the variables executive dominance, party system and cabinet system. When the two groups of countries are treated separately, this cluster is supplemented by another variable, interest group pluralism for the “old” democracies, and the electoral system for the “new” democracies. Overall, those two variables form a second cluster.

However, the federal-unitary dimension falls apart in this study, even if Western and Central Eastern European countries are treated separately. This seems to confirm past findings that the clustering of the variables in the second dimension is due to the specific combination in a handful of bigger countries like USA, Australia or Germany. For small and medium sized countries that comprise the bulk of our study, this approach is obviously futile. In fact, the population size correlates significantly with federalism (0.523*) and bicameralism (0.708**).

[Table 4: Factor analysis of Lijphart's variables (15 European countries 1990-2012)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>All countries</th>
<th>Western Europe</th>
<th>Central Eastern E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive dominance</td>
<td>0.917</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>0.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party system</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.971</td>
<td>0.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One party cabinets</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>0.743</td>
<td>0.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral system</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest group pluralism</td>
<td>0.715</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>-0.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federalism</td>
<td>-0.287</td>
<td>-0.852</td>
<td>0.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicameralism</td>
<td>-0.238</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>0.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial review</td>
<td>-0.568</td>
<td>0.672</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid constitutions</td>
<td>0.436</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Models of direct democracy

Having determined the general characteristics of the 15 political systems examined, the governmental or oppositional traits of direct democracy are evaluated. Six variables are used mirroring different aspects of this phenomenon. The overall base value maps the institutional setting of direct democracy. The average base value shows the institutional position of the actual processes of direct democracy, while the average practice value depicts the governmental or oppositional effectiveness of those processes. The difference between those values indicates a governmental or oppositional tendency in the practice of direct democracy. The overall practice value is calculated by summing the individual practice values for each referendum.

The examined countries score differently according to the variables used. Due to the high number of referendums, Italy has by far the most oppositional overall practice value, but it is overtaken by Slovenia when averages are counted. Several countries move from an oppositional base value to a governmental practice value (Latvia, Lithuania and Ireland), in Portugal it is the other way round. Portugal and France have the strongest oppositional tendencies in their practice of direct democracy, while Hungary, Italy and Ireland have the strongest governmental ones.
Table 5: Indicators of direct democracy (1990-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Base Value of DD average</th>
<th>Base Value of DD overall</th>
<th>Practice Value of DD average</th>
<th>Practice Value of DD overall</th>
<th>Tendency (g/o)</th>
<th>Refend. per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>+0.27</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-2.40</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>+0.43</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>+0.28</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>+0.57</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-6.20</td>
<td>+0.28</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>-2.91</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>-7.20</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>-0.70</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>+0.69</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>-0.83</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-11.20</td>
<td>+0.62</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
The countries are ranked according to the average base value of direct democracy, mirroring the institutional value of the actual processes of direct democracy. The overall base value maps the institutional setting of direct democracy, the overall practice value is calculated by the addition of practice values for each process of direct democracy. The difference between the two average values indicates a governmental or oppositional tendency in the practice of direct democracy.

Again, a factor analysis is carried out to search for correlations between the configuration of direct democracy and Lijphart's variables. In fact, the average base value of direct democracy loads strongly on the three core variables identified above (executive dominance, cabinet type and party system). In addition, there is a negative correlation with the number of referendums per year and the mobilisation of the initiating side. However, there is no correlation with one of the variables of the federal-unitary dimension.

Table 6: Factor analysis between Lijphart and Direct Democracy variables (1990-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor I</th>
<th>Factor II</th>
<th>Factor III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive dominance</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet type</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>-0.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average base value of direct democracy</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party system</td>
<td>0.808</td>
<td>-0.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilisation of the initiators</td>
<td>-0.687</td>
<td>-0.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendums per year</td>
<td>0.238</td>
<td>0.783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral system</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial review</td>
<td>-0.175</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest groups</td>
<td>-0.411</td>
<td>0.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional rigidity</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicameralism</td>
<td>-0.188</td>
<td>-0.146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsequently, we find a significant correlation between the executive-parties dimension and the average base value of direct democracy. It has a value of 0.611* and is significant on the 95 percent level. When the interest group variable is excluded, the correlation becomes significant on the 99 percent level (0.675**). Therefore, the two main hypotheses of the study are confirmed as far as the executive-parties dimension is concerned. They are adapted as follows:
H1: The governmental type of direct democracy correlates with majoritarian political systems in the executives-parties dimension.

H2: The oppositional type of direct democracy correlates with consensual political systems in the executives-parties dimension.

[Figure 2: Average Base Value of Direct Democracy and Executives-Parties Dimension]

Turning to the specific hypotheses, 13 of 20 have been confirmed. In two additional cases, there has been a significant correlation, but it had the opposite sign (H15, H17).

Five hypotheses have not been confirmed. There is no evidence that the frequency of referendums is lower in majoritarian democracies (H3), that oppositional direct democracy correlates with broad governments (H7), that a disparity between the general type of the political system and the configuration of direct democracy has a negative effect on cabinet duration (H10), that oppositional direct democracy correlates with a fragmented party system (H12) and with power-sharing in the federal-unitary dimension (H14).

**Confirmed hypotheses**

H4: Less use is made of governmental instruments of direct democracy in consensual democracies. The correlation is significant on the 99 percent level \(0.658**\). In consensus democracies, the percentage of governmental referendums is lower than in majoritarian democracies.

H5: A high frequency of oppositional processes of direct democracy is incompatible with
majoritarian democracy.
For this hypothesis, only the countries with a positive sign on the executive-parties dimension (France, Portugal, Malta, Poland, Hungary and Lithuania) were examined. Their respective scores correlate negatively with the frequency of oppositional referendums (per year). The correlation is significant on the 95 percent level (-0.852*).

**H6:** Governmental direct democracy correlates with one party cabinets.
The correlation is significant on the 95 percent level (0.638*). The average base value of direct democracy correlates positively with the percentage of one party cabinets. The semi-presidential system of France and Malta represent interesting outliers in this regard.

![Figure 3: One-Party-Cabinets and Direct Democracy](image)

**H8:** In systems with one party cabinets, the practice of direct democracy has a strong oppositional tendency (measured by the difference between the average base value and the average practice value of direct democracy).
The correlation is significant on the 99 percent level (-0.671**). In fact, this means that governmental referendums are more likely to fail under one party governments.

**H9:** The likelihood of governmental defeats in referendums is in inverse proportion with the size of the governmental majority in parliament.
This hypothesis can be tested on the micro level, e.g. all 183 referendums. The correlation is
significant on the 95 percent level (-0.172*).

**H11: Oppositional direct democracy correlates with a strong parliament.**
The correlation is significant on the 95 percent level (-0.549*). Political systems with a higher score on the Parliamentary Powers Index have a lower (ie more oppositional) average base value of direct democracy.

[Figure 4: Strong Parliaments and Direct Democracy]

**H13: Governmental defeats are more likely to occur in systems with a corporatist structure.**
This hypothesis has been confirmed, although with a different dependent variable (“number of successful governmental referendums per year”). The number of successful governmental referendums is therefore higher in countries with a pluralistic interest system. The correlation is significant on the 95 percent level (-0.571*).
**H16:** The performance of government and opposition parties in the referendum predicts the result of the forthcoming elections.

This hypothesis has been confirmed on micro-level, but only for the government parties. Interestingly, the correlation is negative. Thus, an underperformance of the government side at the referendum (calculated by the difference between the theoretical strength of the supporting parties and the actual result) correlates with a better showing at the following elections. The correlation is significant at the 99 percent level (-0.220**). For the opposition side, no correlation was established.
H18: The broader the parliamentary majority of the government, the less likely is the fall of the government after the referendum.
This hypothesis is affirmed on the micro-level, although only for the 50 governmental referendums. The correlation is significant at the 95 percent level (-0.331*).

H19: The longer a government is in office, the more likely it is to lose a referendum.
The correlation between the tenure of the government and the variable “governmental defeat” (counting all referendums where the main government party was on the losing side, regardless of what side initiated it) is highly significant on the 99 percent level (0.214**).

H20: Governing parties have more difficulties to mobilise their vote potential than opposition parties.
As there is only rarely an exact conformity between the initiating side and the government/opposition divide, this hypothesis is tested with an approximation. For every referendum, the difference between the theoretical strength and the actual result of both sides is calculated and then assigned to the main government or opposition party. If referendums where both parties were on the same side are excluded, the side of the main opposition party fared a 6.7 percentage points better at the referendum than the theoretical strength of this side. For the government side, the underperformance had the same extent (-6.7 percentage points).
H21: A strong oppositional practice of direct democracy correlates with low turnout (measured in relation to the last general elections)
This hypothesis was confirmed with various indicators of direct democracy. The correlation was strongest in regard to the practice value of direct democracy, reaching a 99 percent level (0.694**). Therefore it can be assumed that the turnout is lower in countries with an oppositional practice of direct democracy.

H22: A high frequency of referendums correlates with low turnout.
This hypothesis is somewhat related with the preceding one, as an oppositional practice of direct democracy implies a higher frequency of referendums as well. This hypothesis was confirmed, the correlation is significant on the 95 percent level (-0.566*). The higher the number of referendums per year in a given country, the lower is the average turnout in relation to the preceding elections.

Correlations with opposite sign
In two cases, there has been a correlation between the variables, but it is opposite as expected. H15 and H17 are therefore adapted as follows:

H15: The more oppositional the practice of direct democracy, the higher the gains of the main opposition party at the following general elections.
This hypothesis is tested on the micro level, comprising all 133 oppositional referendums. In contrast to the expectation, oppositional parties tend to fare better electorally after oppositional referendums. The lower the base value of the referendum, the higher the subsequent electoral gains. The correlation is significant on the 99 percent level (-0.348**). Even more pronounced is the correlation between the base value of direct democracy and a turnover at the next election (-0.448**). So there is no evidence that an oppositional practice of direct democracy as such (regardless of the result) reinforces the sitting government.

H17: Governmental processes of direct democracy are less likely to cause the fall of the sitting government as oppositional ones.
This hypothesis is also tested on the micro level. The higher the base value of direct democracy, the lower the possibility of a subsequent downfall of the government. The correlation is significant on the 95 percent level (-0.187*). So there is no evidence for the assumption that there is more at stake in governmental processes of direct democracies. On the contrary, oppositional referendums tend to present a greater risk for the stability of the government.

Resume of the quantitative findings
The bivariate analysis has confirmed the basic assumption that there is a connection between Lijphart's concept and the dichotomy of governmental and oppositional direct democracy. In addition, the confirmation of the various hypotheses has provided more specific insight into the interplay between the institutions of the political system and direct democracy. The theoretical assumption that a majoritarian system and an oppositional practice of direct democracy are odds has been confirmed (H5). On the other hand, governmental direct democracy is less frequent in consensus systems (H4). While the governmental type of direct democracy correlates with one party cabinets (H6), the oppositional one does with strong parliaments (H11). While there is no correlation between direct democracy and the configuration of the party system (H12), governments find it harder to succeed in a corporatist interest system (H13).

There is also a clear interconnection between the cabinet type and direct democracy. Under one party cabinets, direct democracy has a clear oppositional tendency (H8). On the other hand, governmental defeats in referendums (H9) and a downfall of the government (H18) are less likely
the broader the parliamentary majority of the government is. Oppositional direct democracy poses a greater threat to the existence of the government as the governmental one (H17). Still, there is no evidence that a oppositional direct democracy correlates with broad parliamentary majorities (H7). And there is also no evidence that a divergence between the general system type and the functioning of direct democracy (oppositional in majoritarian systems and governmental in consensus systems) is detrimental to government stability (H10).

The tenure of the government is a significant indicator for the chances of governmental success at referendums (H19). While the main opposition party tends to gain electorally by an oppositional practice of direct democracy (H15), a bad showing at the referendum increases the chances of electoral success for the main government party (H16). The governmental side regularly mobilizes less of her potential than the opposition side (H20), which may be related to the fact that the turnout is lower in systems with a strong oppositional practice of direct democracy (H21).

**Classification of the examined countries**

According to the general system characteristics and their type of direct democracy, the 15 countries may be classified into four different groups, two ideal types and two mixed types. The first type (majoritarian systems with governmental direct democracy) comprises France, Poland and Lithuania, the second one (consensus systems with oppositional direct democracy) Slovenia, Italy, Slovakia and Denmark. The third type (majoritarian systems with oppositional direct democracy) is made of Portugal, Malta and Hungary, the fourth and biggest one (consensus systems with governmental direct democracy) includes Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Romania and Sweden.

[Figure 7: Models of Direct Democracy]
Type I: France, Poland and Lithuania combine majoritarian traits with the governmental form of direct democracy. This group features the weakest parliaments (Parliamentary Powers Index 3.67), the highest disproportionality of the electoral system (11.89) and the most pluralistic interest system (-2.24). However, the values for the variables cabinet type (40.1), executive dominance (2.57) and party system (3.75) are less majoritarian as in type III. As to direct democracy, this group features a low frequency of referendums (0.4 per year) and a high percentage of processes with elite consensus (73 percent). Naturally, the percentage of governmental referendums is high (66 percent). However, this predominantly governmental practice of direct democracy is quite ineffective: 55.5 percent of all referendums result in a governmental defeat. Subsequently, the comparison between the average base value and the average practice value shows an oppositional trend (-0.3 points). This ineffectiveness also seems to have electoral consequences. 889 percent of all referendums are followed by a turnover at the next election, the highest value of all four groups. The average turnout is 17.8 percent lower than the preceding election.

Type II: Slovenia, Italy, Slovakia and Denmark mark the other extreme, as they are consensus democracies with an oppositional form of direct democracy. In fact, they have the most consensual values in all variables of the executive-parties dimension (cabinet type 21.73; executive dominance 2.23; party system 4.90, electoral system 4.19, corporatism 1.7) and also the strongest parliaments (5.75). This group has the highest frequency of referendums (1.0 per year). Only 14 percent of the referendums are governmental and they are highly ineffective. The percentage of governmental defeat reaches 92.6 percent. One of the reasons may be the low turnout. With a difference of -29.7 percent, this group features the lowest relative turnout.

Type III: Portugal, Hungary and Malta are mixing a predominantly majoritarian system with the oppositional form of direct democracy. This group has the strongest majoritarian values in Lijphart's core variables cabinet type (65.67), executive dominance (4.96) and party system (2.46). In other variables (electoral system 5.61; corporatism -0.4; parliamentary power 4.67) it scores average. The frequency of referendums is the lowest of all types (0.2). 30 percent of all referendums were governmental, and 70 percent of the referendums resulted in governmental defeat. In only 8.3 percent of the cases, there was an elite consensus. This group has the highest success rate for the (predominantly oppositional) initiators, amounting to 83.3 percent. But this group has also the lowest incidence of a change in power after the referendum (37.5 percent). The turnout is -21.2 percentage points below the preceding parliamentary elections.

Type IV: Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Romania and Sweden comprise the last and biggest group, combining consensus democracy and governmental direct democracy. However, the values of two variables (executive dominance 2.71 and corporatism -0.48) are even more majoritarian than type III. The other values are clearly on the consensus side (cabinet type 26.7, party system 4.29, electoral system 4.36, parliamentary power 5.4). Latvia holds a special position, as it has a strongly oppositional base value of direct democracy that turns governmental because of its ineffectiveness. The frequency of referendums is slightly below average (0.38), the percentage of referendums with elite consensus is high (55.6 percent). This group of countries features the highest turnout (-10.8 percentage points) and the biggest consonance of theoretical strength and referendum result. The difference is a mere +0.6 percentage points.
Conclusion

Though direct democracy has long found a solid place in the political systems of most countries, it is still in many ways unchartered territory for scholars of democracy. We still lack generalisable assumptions on the workings of direct democracy and its interplay with other institutions of the political system. This study aimed to fill this gap, building on the groundbreaking work of Arend Lijphart. For this purpose, the multifaceted and contradictory phenomenon of direct democracy was disaggregated along the dichotomy of government and opposition. It was assumed that a governmental use of direct democracy would fit the majoritarian pattern of democracy, while an oppositional use would conform with the consensus pattern. This basic assumption was tested and confirmed in a study of 15 countries and 183 referendums during the period of 1990 to 2012. This implied also the testing of Lijphart's general observations, including on eight newly democratised countries that were not part of his original study. In spite of the arbitrarily selected group of countries, significant correlations were detected in core variables of the executive-parties dimension (executive dominance, cabinet type and party system), with the addition of the interest groups variable for Western Europe and the electoral system variable for Central Eastern Europe. The main finding is, however, that there is an significant correlation between majoritarian democracy and governmental direct democracy on one side and between consensus democracy and oppositional direct democracy on the other. A range of specific hypotheses substantiated this basic finding. Corporatism was found to inhibit the chances of governmental success at referendums, while a strong parliamentary majority reduces the danger of governmental defeat. Governmental players have difficulties to mobilise their potential strength at referendums, but see their electoral chances increased after a bad showing at the referendum. In all, this study provides some tangible results that can serve as basis for further studies about the interplay between direct democracy and the other institutions of the political system. We have just begun to scratch the surface in this regard.
Acknowledgment

I thank Arend Lijphart and the anonymous reviewers for their advice and criticism. This article summarises the main findings of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Vienna.
1 Vatter classifies the institutional and practical setting of direct democracy in a given political system on a twelve point scale. The higher the score, the more consensual it is. Forms of direct democracy that are perceived as majoritarian are simply not counted. Consequently, this scale allows no valid statement as to the strength of a possible majoritarian tendency of direct democracy.

2 According to Lijphart (2012: 233) the year “1994 can be considered the last year in which central banks were still mainly domestic institutions unaffected by the preparatory steps toward the adoption of the euro and other international developments”. Thus, central banks were solely national institutions only during a minor part of the study period (1990-2012).

3 The variable is calculated by discounting the standardised value of the adapted Parliamentary Powers Index from the standardised value of the average cabinet duration, omitting Lijphart’s impressionistic adjustments. Parliamentary power is measured via the following variables taken from the scheme of Fish/Kroenig: (1) exclusive right to replace the executive, (2) selection of the prime minister, (3) appointment of individual ministers, (4) no direct elected president, (5) immunity from dissolution by the executive, (6) executive lacks decree power, (7) executive has no veto power. In addition, also the lack of executive agenda power according to Döring is included. One point is awarded for each aspect. The higher the score, the stronger the parliament.

4 The veto referendum has to be initiated by a majority of the second chamber (Seanad) and a third of the first chamber (Dail) members. In fact, this requirement presupposes a cooperation of government majority and opposition, as the Seanad is usually controlled by the government of the day. In addition, the referendum initiative has to win the support of the president, who is free to refuse it instead of putting it on the ballot paper.

5 The referendum challenge on the divorce law was lost only by 49.7 to 50.3 percent, although there was no parliamentary party to back it.

6 In Sweden, changes to the constitution have to be adopted by two subsequent parliaments. A third of the members of parliament can force a referendum after the first vote, but this referendum has no added value as it is held with the following parliamentary elections. Assuming that referendum and electoral success coincide, the opposition does not need the referendum to frustrate the constitutional revision, as it could as well do so by not enacting it in the new parliamentary term.

7 With a revision of the Constitution in May 2013, the parliamentary minority and the upper chamber lost their right to demand a referendum. In addition, a rejectory quorum was established. The rejection of a law at the referendum is only valid, if the negative majority comprises 20 per cent of the electorate.

8 The tables and files with individual data for each of the 183 processes of direct democracy are included in my doctoral dissertation and will be published on my personal webpage soon. On average, 0.53 referendums per year took place in the examined period. The average base value was -0.40, the average practice value -0.06. The vast majority of those referendums was coded as oppositional (133). Nearly half of all referendums (86) were initiatives, followed by mandatory constitutional referendums (34), governmental parliamentary referendums (25), governmental executive referendums (14) and oppositional parliamentary referendums (13). Nine referendums were coded as neutral. In 45.5 percent of all cases, there was an elite consensus, 39.3 percent were successful (oppositional: 36.8 percent, government: 46 percent). The average turnout was 46.5 percent, or 26.5 percentage points lower than the turnout at the preceding parliamentary elections. Oppositional initiators were better in mobilising (+5.13 percentage points) than the governmental ones (-6.8 percentage points). The oppositional initiators were clearly outnumbered (-20.98 percentage points), while the governmental ones had an even bigger advantage (+24.53 percentage points) on paper. By and large, the theoretical strength of the two sides was replicated at the referendum. The correlation between the theoretical strength and the result is significant on the 99 percent level (0.674**). As far as the topics are concerned, questions relating to the political system dominate (70 referendums), followed by economic and social issues (46), foreign politics (34), human rights (27) and the environment (6).