

Does having different goals in mind matter for the design of participatory institutions? Evidence from an elite survey

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Abstract

In the choice and design of participatory institutions (PI), does having different goals and political objectives in mind matter? Participatory institutions may perform quite different, even contradictory roles. We would expect certain correspondence between the priority goals of these institutions and their working characteristics (institutional design). However, lack almost any research showing whether this correspondence also exists in the minds of their main promoters, political elites.

We analyze this question using a survey to political elites developed (2022-2023) in five European countries (n=998). We analyze the influence of the most important participatory goals a PI should aim to (i.e., empower citizens, inform elites, social justice) in the choice of the most desirable characteristics that PI should have (i.e., openness, binding character, deliberation). The analyses control for several elite traits (country, territorial level, ideology and participatory attitudes). Some goals (social justice) appear to be more consequential than others. Left elites and those politicians more generally attracted to participatory ideas will tend to select the more challenging characteristics of PI, like having a binding character or not including politicians among the voices to be heard.

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Introduction

There has been a considerable development of participatory practices and institutions in many countries around the world¹ (Bachtiger et al, 2018; OECD, 2020). However, beyond their participatory or deliberative component not all these participatory institutions (PI) have similar goals, with some of them emphasizing efficiency or having a large social visibility, while others prioritize empower citizens or reducing social inequalities. The existence of these different goals and priorities has been quite well established by political theory (Dean, 2017; Fung, 2006) or in academic empirical research (Klausen et al, 2022; Mayka and Abbot, 2023; Röcke, 2014), but it is not always sufficiently clear whether political organizers are aware of them and make choices about institutional design (e.g., random selection, majority vote, consensus) with these concerns in mind.

While some of these PI may have been organized by academics or civil society, a majority of them has been set up and/or approved by public administrations. Thus, one of the most important groups of organizers (understood as those making the key decision to go forward) is politicians. Whatever their degree of practical involvement, they have quite often the final choice to develop or not the PI and to choose its main practical rules, like who is involved or which topics will be addressed. Thus, to know politicians' attitudes is not only important in itself, but also because their degree of commitment to these processes has been shown to have important practical consequences (Stolzenberg and Wampler, 2018).

Research about elite preferences regarding participation has received considerable attention on the past years (e.g., Jacquet et al, 2020). However, most of it has addressed more general preferences for participation, without addressing the goals and types of participation politicians have in mind. This paper aims to contribute to this debate in two ways. First, we want to analyze which is the degree of coherence between declared priorities and preferred characteristics of PI. Second, and trying to go one step further, we aim to understand the preferences for diverse PI characteristics, with priority goals being only one among several potential explanatory factors (including ideology or territorial level, among others).

¹ The universe included here is quite diverse, from one-shot punctual consultations like most referenda or Minipublics to permanent or cyclical (e.g., yearly) processes like participatory budgeting. Even with this diversity in its degree of institutionalization, they do normally include a set of formal or informal rules for deliberation and/or decision-making. Through the text we mostly use the term participatory institutions to refer to all of them, combined with the common denomination as “democratic innovations”.

We explore these issues through a survey developed in five European countries, that represent a considerable diversity of European settings: France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Poland. The survey² was addressed to all members of the National Parliament (two chambers included when they existed), of all regional Parliaments (when existing) and to all the local councilors of the largest cities in each of them. The survey was developed in 2023 and obtained 998 valid responses.

With these goals in mind we proceed in several steps. The next two sections develop the theoretical expectations and the specific hypotheses we derive from them. We then present the methodological strategy followed, including the survey characteristics, as well as the operationalization choices made. The following section presents the results of the analyses, and we conclude with a general discussion of the main findings, implications and shortcomings.

Theory 1: Coherence between goals and methods?

Research about PI uses a diverse set of concepts and theoretical approaches, some coming from the deliberative tradition, to others making more emphasis on participation itself. However, the most successful concept used, democratic innovations (Smith, 2009), builds a common framework for both of them, setting a large proportion of shared values and objectives among all this universe of methods, initiatives and institutional designs. Criticisms and alarms about the important differences and diversity existing in this world have been considerable, from those that highlight the different and at some points contradictory goals of deliberation and participation (Sintomer, 2011), to others that signal an even larger set of diverse goals and political objectives (Dean, 2017; Mayka and Abbot, 2023).

A crucial distinction lies in whether these different goals could go hand-in-hand with each other, as much of the democratic innovations literature has more or less explicitly assumed (for example, Smith, 2009), whether they belong to different independent dimensions where different combinations among them were possible (for example, Fung 2006) or whether they represent choices and priorities so that a certain trade-off or zero sum relationship exists among them (e.g., Dean 2019). The first one of these approaches imagines characteristics of PI as certain accumulative criteria that all contribute to a deeper or more transformative “democratic innovation”. The second one

² The survey was part of the Eucommet Project, funded by the European Union through the H2020 program. <https://www.eucommet.eu/>

starts to suggest certain tensions between these characteristics, so that priorities among them may be established. Finally, in the third one, these choices are not independent, because they encompass competing values (e.g., being “agonistic” or “solidaristic”, (Dean 2019) and entail distributing resources (money, time and others) and making clear priorities, in a certain zero sum logic. From this perspective, resources allocated to enhance specific characteristics (e.g., selection or decision-making procedures), are not redirected to a different element (e.g., increasing turnout or making it more inclusive). If this approach was right (and we tend to think that it is) there should be at least a certain degree of coherence between the most important objectives pursued in a given PI (e.g., effectiveness, empowerment) with the decisions made about its institutional design, like participant selection, decision-making procedures and others.

One of the potential flaws of this approach is whether it is too demanding for non-expert publics. Academics that devote most of their day to these topics may be aware of this correspondence between prioritized goals and design choices, but this may not be the case for citizens, politicians or public officials. For them, a certain desire to be more listened or to incorporate citizen preferences may exist, without necessarily incorporating clear priority goals or adequate strategies to achieve them. The empirical analysis of this degree of congruence is limited, but the internal consistency among the democratic preferences of citizens has been analyzed (Bengtsson, 2012), as well as the congruence between preferences and behaviors (Gherghina and Geissel, 2017). Results, in both cases, point to at least certain degree of appropriate fit between them. Lucas et al (2024) have also analyzed the correspondence between these democratic theories and preferences with the representation styles politicians perform once in office, showing their translation in relevant professional behaviors.

Analysis regarding politicians’ participation preferences is a relatively recent issue. Among others, this renewed interest has shown that political elites seem to be quite less enthusiastic than citizens about PI (Koskimaa and Rapelli, 2020), preferring less structured and more informal dialogues with citizens (Hendriks and Lees-Marshment, 2019). Quantitative analysis based on elite survey preferences have established distinctions between direct democratic and deliberative forms (Junius et al, 2020) and shown that politicians especially reject the idea that citizens make binding decisions (Jacquet et al, 2020; Pasadas et al, 2023).

Research is even more limited regarding our specific objectives. A scant empirical attention has been given to the main goals of the PI developed (Dean, 2019; Vallbé et al,

2018). Even if a considerable attention has been paid to diverse types of participatory formats (from Minipublics to referenda) and their particular characteristics (more or less participants, more or less focus on deliberation, etc.), to our knowledge, no attention has been given to the relationship between goals and strategies (including formats and characteristics) followed. How strong (if any) is the degree of coherence among them, especially on the mind of their main promoters?

Most of these participation goals are not politically divisive, resembling more valence issues (like achieving more efficiency, transparency and better epistemic policy solutions) that have in fact appeared in messages from very distinctive political actors from right and left, including international development institutions. However, achieving social justice appears as the most distinctive among these possible objectives. First, this is not an objective obviously linked to participation, but the acceptance of an instrumental use of participation to achieve other kind of substantive policy goals. Second, this is an objective which is a political priority for some political actors, but clearly not for others (Bobbio, 1997). From these ideas we derive our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Social justice will be the most distinctive goal. We expect higher associations than others to the most transformative PI organizational characteristics like outcomes having a binding character, presence of the less well-off participants and the exclusion of politicians.

Theory 2: The explanatory factors of PI characteristics

Clarifying these relationships requires a deeper discussion into the potential list of relevant PI characteristics. Among all the possible details of a PI some of them have a more technical character. Even if their specific design could also have relevant social consequences and introduce (or reduce) social biases, having the discussion face-to-face or online could be one of these more technical choices: the election may be more related to the scale of the community (making easy a face to face discussion if the process is being developed in a small municipality or making much easier an online debate if the decision encompasses all Europe, for example).

However, several other characteristics have a very decisive influence in who is being mobilized, how or what for. We focus on two most important decisions. First, following most previous research, we distinguish between 1) PI more focused on direct democratic logics, where the general idea is to facilitate the participation of large sectors of the population, often to produce binding decisions; and 2) more deliberative forums,

more focused on consensus building and good epistemic decisions³. In fact, these two sets of characteristics are related to the traditional Lijphart's (2012) distinction between majoritarian democracy (using direct democracy styles procedures like referenda) and consensus democracy, where discussion and compromise outweigh the importance of voting procedures. Minipublics were still not common when Lijphart built his typology, but this kind of PI would easily accommodate most of these consensual priorities.

Second, some PI characteristics are less controversial than others. For example, incorporating more participants may be a priority for direct democrats, but not for consensus-seekers. However, they would not oppose per se this choice⁴. Other features may face stronger challenges. For example, in the context of a representative democracy, the idea that politicians' voices would not be heard is more problematic. Whether through their direct participation in the process itself (like in Advisory councils or in some Minipublics⁵), or by having a direct voice in whether the consultation has to be developed or the recommendation has to be followed, politicians' voice is most often heard at some point. Excluding them and making recommendations binding are, as a result, two of the design characteristics that represent a major break with the representative democracy logic.

The idea of allowing or equally facilitating the voices of any interested citizen would be another central idea followed by almost any PI. The strategies followed may go from designing a process open to anyone, to embracing random selection, but sharing equal opportunities to be heard would be a central choice, which goes against the idea of forcing quotas or even over-representing the voices of the most excluded sectors of society. This proposal has also existed, but has been in practice in the minority side, making its choice also a more challenging option.

On the contrary, ideas like giving deliberation a central character in the process or to facilitate consensus and depolarize opinions are traits that would face quite less resistance from existing political and theoretical frames, making them less challenging.

³ The distinction between these two general types of participation has a strong tradition. In its application to the analysis of elite preferences, see for example Junius et al (2020).

⁴ Some Minipublic formats like citizen juries work with a small number of citizens, but others like Citizen Assemblies tend to incorporate larger number of participants (Bachtiger et al, 2018).

⁵ This has been the case in some of the most influential Irish Citizens Assemblies (Farrel et al, 2024) or in an even more central role in the directly representative model suggested by Neblo et al (2019).

The combination of these two characteristics is reflected in table 1, resulting in this four-category typology that we use to build our remaining hypotheses.

	Direct democracy	Deliberative Democracy
More transformative	Binding No politicians	Presence of excluded populations
Less challenging	More participants	Deliberative Consensual

Table 1. A typology of PI characteristics

Even if coherence between goals and PI characteristics existed, the relationship would never be perfect. To start with, because there are no clear rules or previous research that would guarantee that a given PI characteristic would certainly produce a specific goal. Also, because other factors are also likely to be related to these design preferences, from the experience, context or trajectory of the politician, to all his other values and ideas.

Political ideology is one of the most obvious candidates. The relationship of left-right ideology and participatory preferences is a matter of dispute, with previous research showing some contradictory findings, depending on types of instruments and World-areas (Ramis, 2023). In any case, a substantial part of the literature concerning both, citizens and elites, points to a certain relationship between left ideology and a stronger preference or commitment to participatory initiatives. Even if empirical evidence is not clear, we claim there are reasons to expect left ideologies to be more consistently related to participatory formats that incorporate accepting lay knowledge as relevant information to contribute to the public debate (Nez, 2015). Right-wing parties, on the other hand, may be more cautious: if citizen's voices are to be heard, they should be informed by expert sources prioritizing filters, resources or institutions like deliberation to enhance citizen knowledge. A similar pattern appears among citizens, where there is a positive relationship between direct democratic preferences and left-wing ideology, and a neutral one with deliberative preferences (Rapeli and Strandberg, 2024). In sum, considering our distinction between direct democratic preferences and deliberative ones we expect:

Hypothesis 2.1. Left politicians will tend to support the characteristics associated to direct democracy.

Even if some relationship between left and participation existed, this would be far from perfect. The participatory tradition of the left may be better known, but demands

and arguments in favor of participation have emerged from very different parts of the political spectrum⁶. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) claimed for example that a participation versus representation conflict would be completely independent from the left-right divide and some empirical research has provided evidence of the relevance of this public opinion division among citizens (Fernández-Martínez and Font, 2018). If these preferences would also be relevant among political elites we should expect them to favor support to those participation characteristics which are more challenging, as well as to those that encompass more direct citizen participation:

Hypothesis 2.2. Politicians who favor a larger role for citizens in policy-making will support the characteristics associated to direct democracy, as well as those which are more transformative.

Finally, the local arena has been the privileged locus for citizen participation during decades in most countries (Bherer, 2010; Vetter, 2009). Even if interesting developments have also recently occurred at the national and supra-national levels⁷, politicians at the local level are quite more likely to have experienced some kind of citizen participation institution than those working at wider territorial levels. This larger experience (and more limited prejudice) would be the main reason to expect:

Hypothesis 2.3. Local politicians will favor more than others participatory processes that are more transformative.

Data and methods

The University of Siena Lab developed an independent online survey with policymakers (hereinafter elite survey) in order to gain insight into the attitudes and preferences of the political elite towards participatory and deliberative decision-making processes. The elite survey was conducted, from January to March 2023, in five EU countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Poland)⁸, spanning various territorial levels (local, regional and national, when it exists). The target population included all elected representatives in December 2022 at the national level (both chambers, when they

⁶ This includes a recent considerable research about the populist far-right and its participatory ideas and practices (see Gherghina et al, 2023 among many others)

⁷ For example, Isernia and Fishkin (2014) shows one experience at the EU level and the OECD (2020) collects many of the recent experiences of Minipublics at the national level.

⁸ Prior to this, a pilot phase took place in Spain during the autumn of 2021. This paper exclusively relies on the results obtained from the survey conducted in the five main countries.

exist), regional level (in all countries but Ireland that does not have them) and all elected councilors in the 25 largest cities in each of them.

The final sample comprises 712 complete interviews and 286 partial interviews, resulting in a combined response rate of 7,2%. Table 2 presents the obtained sample size and the response rates, both categorized by country and territorial level. The local level exhibits a higher response rate (10,5%) compared to the national and regional levels (3,6% and 5,2% respectively). Furthermore, Germany stands out with a significantly higher response rate (9,9%) compared to the other countries. Additionally, when examining the distribution based on political party or groups of parties, the response rate is notably higher among green, left-wing, and social democratic parties. This pattern remains consistent across countries.⁹

	France		Germany		Ireland		Italy		Poland		Total	
	Obtained sample (%)	Response rate	Obtained sample (%)	Response rate	Obtained sample (%)	Response rate	Obtained sample (%)	Response rate	Obtained sample (%)	Response rate	Obtained sample (%)	Response rate
National level	10,9	2.8%	5,8	2.8%	11,2	6.3%	20,3	6.8%	9,6	2.2%	10,5	3.6%
Regional level	35,1	4.0%	31,4	6.8%	-	-	19,3	4.1%	20,0	6.0%	25,7	5.2%
Local level	54,0	5.5%	62,8	18.3%	88,8	8.4%	60,4	11.2%	70,4	10.7%	63,8	10.5%
Total	100 (202 n)	4.4%	100 (395n)	9.9%	100 (89n)	8.1%	100 (187n)	7.6%	100 (125n)	7.0%	100 (998n)	7.2%

Table 2: Obtained Sample. Response rate. Complete + partial interviews. Percentage by columns

The questionnaire includes different sets of questions centered around four main themes: basic demographic and attitudinal issues; views on democracy and decision-making process; general perceptions regarding different types of PIs and, finally, evaluations of more concrete characteristics and features of PIs. Most of the variables used here belong to the latter set of questions.

Starting with our **dependent variables**, we use six items aimed to capturing support towards specific design features of PIs: dv^1 , openness to everyone; dv^2 ,

⁹ In sum, some deviations from the population distribution should be considered. For instance, Germany (40 percent of the total), local level (64 percent of the total) and left-wing parties are overrepresented compared to the other countries, territorial levels, and political parties.

minorities' inclusion; dv^3 , politicians' exclusion; dv^4 , binding decision; dv^5 , deliberative-oriented, and dv^6 , consensus-seeking. Political elites were asked to indicate their level of agreement (ranging from 0 for 'totally disagree' to 10 for 'totally agree') with a set of statement capturing the (aforementioned) key aspects of designing and organizing deliberative events with randomly selected citizens.¹⁰ Table 3 below displays the mean values for each dependent variable measured on the original 0-10 scale. Among the political elite in the analyzed countries, excluding politicians in favor of including randomly selected citizens is deemed the least favorable design choice (light grey). Conversely, the inclusion of minorities is consistently rated as the most favored choice (dark grey), except in the case of Poland. Given that the dependent variables did not follow a normal distribution, for further explanatory analysis (using Ordinary Logistic Regressions, OLR), they were recoded into ordinal variables with 3 categories, being 0 'totally disagree' (values from 0 to 3) and 2 'totally agree' (values from 7 to 10), and 1 meaning the intermediate agreement (values from 4 to 6).

	France		Germany		Ireland		Italy		Poland	
	Media	SD	Media	SD	Media	SD	Media	SD	Media	SD
Openness to everyone	6,06	2,856	4,99	2,381	5,79	2,591	5,39	2,45	5,11	2,772
Minorities inclusion	7,81	2,257	7,21	2,734	7,83	2,189	7,39	2,116	6,34	2,717
Politicians exclusion	5,14	3,052	3,71	2,738	3,87	3,061	4,46	2,669	4,21	2,654
Deliberation	6,43	2,531	6,14	2,253	6,44	2,131	5,53	2,08	6,26	2,44
Consensus-seeking	6,82	2,555	6,96	2,363	7,17	2,283	6,4	2,096	7,23	2,049
Binding	6,15	2,668	4,67	2,858	5,44	2,614	5,3	2,468	6,02	2,331

Table 3: Mean values per country. Dependent variables. Min. value 0, max. value 10.

Concerning the objectives of PIs, which constitute our primary set of **independent variables**, respondents were prompted to select the objective they deemed most important from the following options: effectiveness, transparency, social justice, inform elites, empower citizens and reduce political disaffection.¹¹ Here, there is a greater variety of

¹⁰ Question wording: "Regarding the organization of deliberative events with randomly selected citizens, please, indicate your views on these sentences using a scale from 0-10, where 0 means "Totally disagree" and 10 means "Totally agree". Openness to everyone ("the more participants any of these events has, the better"); minorities inclusion ("The composition of any of these events should fully guarantee the presence of minorities and less well-off citizens"); politicians exclusion ("The group of participants should only include randomly selected citizens, not politicians"); deliberative-oriented ("I feel that it is most important to guarantee careful deliberation, even at the cost of having less participants or less impact"); consensus-seeking ("The framing of the event should facilitate consensus and depolarise opinions"); binding-decision ("The outputs of any of these events should have a binding character for political institutions").

¹¹ Question wording: "What do you think should be the main objective of a participatory process? Achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency in policy decisions; increase the transparency of policy decisions; reduce social injustices; Inform elites about citizens' preferences to make better decisions; Empower citizens and create a critical spirit; reduce political disaffection by bringing citizens and representatives closer together".

opinions among the political elite of each country, regarding goal prioritization. Table 4 displays the distribution of the main objectives by country (dark grey, most favored objective; light grey, least favored objective).

	France	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Poland
Effectiveness	25,1	15,6	24	21,8	25,5
Transparency	9,1	36,2	20	11,5	17,3
Reduce social injustice	4,6	7,9	10,7	7,9	4,5
Inform elites	10,9	4,7	2,7	7,9	18,2
Empower citizens	25,1	11,2	18,7	27,3	31,8
Reduce political disaffection	25,1	24,4	24	23,6	2,7
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4: Preferred participation goals per country. Percentage by columns.

The second set of independent variables is composed by two eleven points scales: ideology (0 = left; 10 = right)¹² and participatory scale (0 = citizens-oriented; 10 = politicians-oriented)¹³. These variables were recoded as dichotomous variables: ideology (*1 = left politicians*, values from 0 to 4; *2 = the rest*, values from 5 to 10) and participatory scale (*1 = citizens-oriented*, values from 0 to 3; *2 = the rest*, values from 4 to 10). Table 5 shows the distribution of ideology and participatory scale by country. Lastly, two categorical variables were used as control: country (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Poland) and territorial level (national, regional and local) (see Table 2).

Table 5: Left and citizen oriented politicians by country.

	France	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Poland
Left-wing politicians	45,5	49,4	33,7	43,9	22,4
Citizens-oriented politicians	12,4	6,8	6,7	4,8	8

Before delving deeper into the explanatory analyses, it is worthwhile to have a look into the relationship between goals and choices. Table 6 compares the average support for each design characteristic among supporters of each objective. We observe

¹² Question wording: "In politics people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right'. Using this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right, where would you place yourself?"

¹³ Question wording: "We want to know your opinion on how political decisions should be made in (COUNTRY). On a scale of 0-10 where "0" means citizens making all decisions on their own, and "10" means politicians making all decisions on their own, where would you place yourself?"

that regardless of the chosen objective, the least favored design characteristic is the exclusion of politicians (light grey), while the most favored one is the inclusion of minorities (dark grey).

	Openness to everyone	Minorities inclusion	Politicians exclusion	Deliberation	Consensus-seeking	Binding
Effectiveness	5,74	7,47	4,57	6,42	7,17	5,74
Transparency	5,53	7,46	4,92	6,57	7,02	5,72
Reduce social injustices	5,72	8,17	5,40	5,98	6,70	7,00
Inform elites	6,55	7,15	5,33	6,23	7,04	5,77
Empower citizens	5,51	7,48	5,07	6,20	7,19	5,89
Reduce political disaffection	5,56	7,31	4,38	6,20	6,98	5,64
Total	5,66	7,46	4,83	6,32	7,06	5,83

Table 6: average support for each design characteristic among supporters of each objective

Results

Table 7 displays the results of our full OLR model, including as explanatory factors all the variables mentioned above¹⁴. First, regarding the degree of congruence between objectives and design choices made, we examine the extent to which politicians' preferences for declared goals and priorities and for specific design characteristics reveal a coherent map or framework of relationships, or on the contrary, do not show any clear pattern.

The data reveal three noteworthy trends or patterns. Firstly, as table 6 already suggested, prioritization of specific objectives does not -definitively- determine support for design characteristics. Most of the analyzed objectives appear to influence only one or two design-related characteristics. However, secondly, while there is not a complete pattern of coherence, there are specific or partial patterns. Consistent with **hypothesis 1**, we observe that among all the analyzed objectives, the one related to reducing social injustices stands out as the most distinct. Specifically, prioritizing reducing social injustices is associated with supporting the inclusion of minorities, the exclusion of politicians, and the binding nature of these minipublics.

¹⁴ Appendix includes complementary regression models (Model 1-Appendix includes only control variables as predictors, while Model 2-Appendix adds ideology and participatory scale).

	Openness		Minorities inclusion		Politicians exclusion		Deliberation		Consensus-seeking		Binding	
	B ¹⁵	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
France	,785***	<,001	,524*	,042	,942**	<,001	,464	,236	-,221	,326	1,159***	<,001
Poland	,136	,567	-,236	,366	-,187	,437	-,141	,564	-,148	,586	1,334***	<,001
Ireland	,497^(.)	,063	,879*	,014	-,080	,773	,457	,140	-,139	,650	,776**	,005
Italy	,345^(.)	,089	,129	,593	,680***	<,001	-,401^(.)	,052	-,568**	,009	,738***	<,001
Germany (ref. cat.)												
National	,260	,300	-,286	,310	-,515*	,047	-,013	,958	,014	,958	-,287	,258
Regional	,053	,757	-,083	,680	,047	,787	-,227	,194	-,006	,977	-,119	,498
Local (ref. cat.)												
Left	,266^(.)	,077	1,571***	,000	,043	,776	-,137	,375	,225	,176	,757***	,000
Participation	,765**	,005	,452	,182	,844**	<,001	-,788**	,003	-,500^(.)	,070	1,430***	,000
Efficiency	-,039	,856	,142	,576	,162	,464	,146	,507	-,044	,852	,012	,958
Transparency	,119	,575	,166	,508	,617**	,005	,429^(.)	,051	-,080	,734	,123	,571
SocialJustice	,256	,415	1,151*	,023	,896**	,005	-,318	,317	-,338	,315	1,409***	,000
InformElites	,299	,319	,263	,447	,619*	,039	-,119	,695	-,096	,770	-,116	,701
EmpowerCitizens	-,204	,359	,123	,647	,629**	,006	,125	,586	,291	,250	,062	,786
Political disaffection (ref. cat.)												

(.) = 0,1; * = < 0,05; ** = < 0,01; *** = < 0,001

Table 7: Ordinary Logistic Regressions. Full models. Reference categories: Germany (for country), local (for territorial level) and, Political Disaffection (for objectives).

Thirdly, an intriguing pattern emerges: the exclusion of politicians as a central characteristic in the design of these events. Remarkably, all objectives, except for efficiency, exhibit a positive relationship with supporting the exclusion of politicians from these events and prioritizing the random inclusion of individual citizens. In the discussion section, we will go back to this result.

Regarding the influence of *other explanatory factors*, a clear pattern emerges with **ideology**. Politicians who position themselves to the left of the ideological spectrum are more likely to positively value those elements of design that have a closer relationship with direct democracy. In this regard, in Table 7, we observe how left-leaning politicians

are more favorable towards the binding nature of these events, as well as towards making them open to everyone, thus facilitating the participation of as many people as possible. Conversely, the same level of support is not observed towards deliberative democracy, except regarding the inclusion of minorities. Therefore, most of the results would align with our **hypothesis 2.1**, except regarding the exclusion of politicians,

Participatory attitudes of politicians are an even more powerful predictor of design choices. Politicians advocating for a greater role of citizens in the decision-making processes (citizens-oriented) tend to support design characteristics associated to direct democracy to a greater extent. Table 7 shows how those citizens-oriented politicians favor opening participation as much as possible, excluding politicians from these events, and giving decisions adopted a binding nature. Based on these findings, **hypothesis 2.2** would be largely confirmed, with the exception of the association between support greater participation and favoring the inclusion of minorities. In this case, the direction effect aligns with the theoretical expectation but did not reach statistical significance.

Also, our findings suggest that those politicians advocating for increased citizens influence in the decision-making process (citizens-oriented), not only hold positive attitudes towards direct democracy, but also display less enthusiasm for aspects associated with the deliberative model of democracy. Specifically, there is a significant negative relationship between this citizen-oriented scale and the importance attributed to ensuring the quality of deliberation and seeking consensus.

Finally, our third explanatory factor concerns the influence of the territorial **level**. **Hypothesis 2.3** suggests that local politicians would be more supportive of citizens involvement compared to politicians at higher levels of government. However, our findings do not indicate a significant influence of the territorial level on design choices, except in the case of the exclusion of politicians: Local politicians support more than others the design option that would exclude political representatives from these events. For the other two variables where we expected a relationship (all those we labelled “more transformative”), the relationship goes in the expected direction, but does not reach statistical significance.

We had no specific expectations regarding country variables and most of the significant coefficients (four in Italy, three in France, two in Ireland and one in Germany) do not show any clear pattern with one exception: Italian politicians do not favor

deliberative characteristics, showing clear negative coefficients in the two characteristics most clearly aligned with it (deliberation and consensus).

Discussion

The first goal of this text was to analyze the internal consistency of elite attitudes regarding deliberative events. Are the goals they have in mind for PI aligned with the design characteristics they favor? If we had to provide a simple answer to this question, our results point to a limited association: there are more popular goals (effectiveness or empowerment) and there are design characteristics more popular than others, but the degree of coherence among them is mild at most. Most politicians will tend to favor PI that include minorities, seek consensus and do not exclude politicians, whatever they have one type of goals or another in mind.

In spite of this headline, results also show support to our hypotheses 1, where we expected some association to appear and to be particularly strong for those who consider that reducing social injustices should be the main aim of these institutions. This is clearly the case: reducing social injustices is one of the least chosen goals for PIs, but those politicians that have this objective in mind choose clearly more often some of the most transformative design options (making binding decisions, excluding politicians and guaranteeing the presence of minorities).

The other set of associations between goals and methods is more puzzling and deserves further attention: four (of the five) goals considered show a positive and significant association with excluding politicians. We do not have a fully convincing answer for this pattern, which could be related to being the least popular of the design characteristics analyzed.

In any case, data show a limited association between the two types of expressed preferences (goals and design) and this may be due to a combination of factors, from unclear preferences, to limited knowledge about how these two factors are related (or clear knowledge showing, in fact, that in most cases there are no necessary associations), to limits in questionnaire design¹⁶ or the idea that we will more fully discuss below, the

¹⁶ The question about the goals talks about “participatory process in general, while the question about characteristics deals with “deliberative events”. Respondents could establish a relationship between certain goals and choosing a deliberative event instead of a referendum, but consider that once deliberation has

role played by other explanatory factors of these design preferences. In any case, whereas our results confirm the idea that associations between the objectives politicians have in mind and the methods used exist, the limited character of this association also represents a challenge for research that highlights the contradictory nature of some of these goals and methods (Mayka and Abbot, 2023).

Part of the limited association is clearly related to other intervening preferences: If I were strongly against binding decisions because I generally distrusted citizen participation, this will be my choice, whatever the most important goal for a PI would be. Other general experiences and preferences are likely to be more important and we can see this effect both, through the significant coefficients of other explanatory variables, as well as through the overall explanatory power of the different models shown in the appendix.

The most important contribution of these general preferences is the one covered by our hypothesis 2.2: general attitudes towards participation. These are significantly associated with most design choices, showing a positive relationship with the three characteristics more related to a direct democracy style (as expected) and to two of the most transformative ones. May be even more interesting is the fact that there is also a significant negative association with those more consensual characteristics, deliberation and consensus seeking. This result (together with others pointing to a similar direction) highlight again the likely contradictory character of more majoritarian style characteristics with those that are more openly deliberative, in line with those arguments that have shown the tensions between deliberative and participatory ideals (Sintomer, 2011; Young, 1999).

One of the design characteristics analyzed plays a less clear role. Our typology in figure 1 includes the choice for guaranteeing the presence of minorities and excluded populations as one of the options related to a deliberative model. However, the question is in fact implicitly forcing the respondents to make a choice between two “deliberative” values, since guaranteeing this inclusion may be at the cost of pure random selection and equality of opportunity. For this or for any other reason, whereas deliberation and consensus show consistently coefficients in the same direction, this pattern is not equally clear for the presence of minorities, suggesting that its fit in the deliberative model is not so clearly established (at least in politicians’ minds).

been chosen as a strategy, design choices are less crucial. Thus, this combined set of questions represents a scenario where this coherence is least likely to show.

Left values are also important for making design choices, as our hypothesis 2.1. suggested. However, not all results are in line with expectations: there are two significant coefficients (one of them, substantively small) for two of the direct democracy characteristics, but not for the other one, the exclusion of politicians. The same would be true if we decided to read figure 1 in rows: more transformative characteristics are similarly associated to left ideologies. These two partial agreements leave open the debate of whether it is the challenging character or the direct democratic one, which would be more related to leftist ideas.

The territorial level where politicians work has appeared as being less consequential than expected (hypothesis 2.3). For only one of the choices (excluding politicians) we find a significant difference when we compare with the national level (not with the regional one, which shows no difference). This may be probably due to the particular characteristics of our local sample, where only big cities are represented. These are the settings where more professionalized and less different politicians (who possibly have been or aspire to go to other territorial levels) are present.

Finally, there are several aspects that deserve further attention. For example, we decided not to pay detailed attention to the national contexts, since this alternative path may have required quite detailed analyses of the participatory histories and experiences of each of them. However, we cannot rule out their potential role. Is Italian politicians' special reluctance towards deliberative characteristics somehow related to the strong referendum tradition in this country? Only more detailed attention to these national contexts can contribute to answer this question. Similar things could be said about other variables, some of which are available in the dataset (e.g., perceptions of citizen capacities) and other which are not (a full trajectory of the politicians' experience showing her degree of professionalization). In any case, the participatory choices that politicians make matter and this paper represents a first step towards understanding their internal (limited) consistency and some of their crucial explanatory factors.

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Appendix

	Openness	Minorities inclusion	Politicians exclusion	Deliberation	Consensus-seeking	Binding
	B	B	B	B	B	B
France	0,749**	1,219**	0,635*	0,209	-0,281	0,117
Germany	-0,02	0,721**	-0,257	-0,134	-0,109	-0,986***
Ireland	0,411	1,179**	-0,296	0,262	-0,037	-0,326
Italy	0,256	0,753**	0,390	-0,593*	-0,622*	-0,337
Poland ¹						
National	0,218	-0,628**	-0,542*	0,007	-0,040	-0,439(.)
Regional	-0,004	-0,419**	-0,002	-0,199	-0,067	-0,300(.)
Local						

(.) = 0,1; * = < 0,05; ** = < 0,01; *** = < 0,001

1 Reference category is not the same that in the full model (Germany)

	Openness	Minorities inclusion	Politicians exclusion	Deliberation	Consensus-seeking	Binding
France	0,624**	0,694*	0,594	0,293	-0,353	-0,241
Germany	-0,096	0,199	-0,260	-0,101	-0,201	-1,282***
Ireland	0,379	1,115**	-0,332	0,293	-0,058	-0,437
Italy	0,190	0,319	0,388	-0,568*	-0,704**	-0,593*
Poland*						
National	0,281	-0,300	-0,529*	-0,025	-0,001	-0,275
Regional	0,064	-0,096	0,012	-0,224	-0,017	-0,134
Local						
Left	0,272(.)	1,607***	0,089	-0,148	0,220	0,815***
Participation	0,741**	0,462	0,895**	-0,785**	-0,466(.)	1,411***

(.) = 0,1; * = < 0,05; ** = < 0,01; *** = < 0,001

1 Reference category is not the same that in the full model (Germany)