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Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century

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Mobilizing Referenda: The Effects of Direct Democracy on Youth Political Participation

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Abstract

This paper investigates determinants of adolescents' political participation in two political systems. Political participation of adolescents is influenced by personal resources such as cognitive abilities as well as institutional context, for example the political system. In this study we examine the interplay of one systemic factor, namely whether the political system is a direct or representative democracy, and resources on the individual level: news media use and internal political efficacy. We apply a Most Similar Systems Design by comparing two largely similar countries (Netherlands and Switzerland) that differ in one critical institutional variable (representative versus direct democracy). The comparison between Switzerland and the Netherlands reveals that adolescents in Switzerland participate significantly more in political activities. The relationship between direct democratic institutions and political participation is partially mediated by political efficacy. However, the mediation only occurs if adolescents use news media regularly.

Why do similar adolescents participate more in politics in one context than in another? This fundamental question is at the core of this research endeavor. We investigate adolescents in two highly similar environments, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Dutch and Swiss adolescents have a lot in common. As a comprehensive comparison conducted by the newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (2011) recently established, both societies are characterized by similar levels of human development and social welfare, urbanicity, population density and multiculturalism; both have strong education systems, a protestant work ethos, a liberal political history, a global economy and recently show some both show nationalist backlashes. However, there is an important difference: Whereas the Netherlands are a prototypical example of representative democracy, the political system in Switzerland is complemented by direct democratic institutions. Previous research indicates – as we will show shortly – that the Swiss are politically much more involved than the Dutch. Focusing on young people in the crucial age bracket of 15 to 18 years, we aim to explain this outcome by focusing on three parameters: direct democratic institutions, internal political efficacy, and news media use. The difference in political systems is, in a characteristic combination with individual resources, expected to be at the core of the gap in political participation of the youth in both countries.

Social changes have shifted citizenship norms which in turn have affected citizen's political behaviours. Duty-based citizenship norms are declining, particularly among the young, while norms of engaged citizenship are gaining in importance (Dalton 2006). While duty-based citizenship norms promote turnout, the new citizenship norms which appeal mainly to the younger generations promote other forms of political action and organisation. The political participation repertoire got enriched by many forms ranging from voluntarism to public protest; highly structured and tightly run organizations have given way to voluntary associations and ad-hoc advocacy groups (Coleman & Blumler 2009; Dalton 2008; van Deth 2003). Non-surprisingly, political participation is currently a highly debated area of political behaviour research (Dalton 2009). Besides generational effects, adolescents' participation

differs from the participation of the elderly because of their low age. The latter matters because many of the young are not yet eligible to vote and because of developmental factors. At the institutional level we argue that direct democratic institutions are pertinent to the changing nature of citizen participation as well as the needs of young citizens. Effectively, direct democratic institutions may provide a fertile breeding ground for the participation of today's younger generation. At the individual level, we include internal political efficacy and news media use into our explanation of the positive effect of direct democratic institutions on political participation. Political efficacy and media use are generally expected to have a positive effect on political participation. However, the direct democratic environment is assumed to amplify these effects for the younger generations, as we will demonstrate.

Studying adolescents, defined as 15 to 18 year olds in this study, is important for several reasons. First, direct democratic processes offer many spontaneous issue-specific opportunities to influence policy decisions. This specific nature of decision-making fits well with a young way of life (Dalton 2006; Rothenbühler & Kissau 2011). Second, although adolescents are minors and have no voting right yet, they can play an influential role in the decision making process before a referendum or initiative (the two most typical direct democratic instruments)¹ is held. This includes, for instance, the public display of one's own concerns or the mobilization and persuasion of those eligible to vote. A third reason is that adolescents are fully adapted to the current technical environment, in particular the Internet (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). Since new forms of political participation like online protesting are on the rise and a potentially influential supplement to hitherto existing forms of participation, it is worthwhile to study a group that has the skills to use these tools. (see Bennett 2008; Livingstone 2007). In fact, no other age-group uses online forms of participation more frequently than the young (e.g. Gibson et al. 2005). Finally, adolescence is a crucial period in life with regard to the development of political behavior. A choice to take part or turn away from politics taken at this age may last a lifetime (Hurrlemann et al. 2008: 14; Rippl 2008: 445). Therefore, analyzing the mechanisms that bring about political participation in this age group is especially relevant.

Departing from a more engaged citizenship perspective, and, hence, taking into account new forms of political participation, is one of the key characteristics of this paper. Most studies that investigate the impact of direct democratic institutions on political participation like Smith & Tolbert (2004), Bühlmann (2007) or Reilly (2010) applied a narrow definition of participation which mainly includes voting and electing officials. But direct democratic institutions can be expected to affect other forms of political participation too. Their institutional proceeding also encompasses informal public opinion formation and involves non-institutionalized forms of participation (Kriesi 1994: 235). Therefore a broad definition of political participation provides a fuller picture of direct democratic institutions than if only turnout would be investigated.

Political participation in representative and direct democracies

Citizens in direct democracies are regularly called upon to co-determine policy decisions. In a representative democracy like the Netherlands, however, citizens' possibility to sanction government is fundamentally restricted in two ways. First, political initiative remains on the side of the government. Second, only collective decisions and not single decisions may be sanctioned. In a representative democratic regime that is complemented by direct democratic institutions (like Switzerland), on the other hand, these restrictions are partly removed. In Switzerland, groups of citizens can launch referendums against a broad range of governmental decisions and they can initiate new constitutional articles any time. And all citizens are asked to campaign for and vote about these referendums and initiatives. The role of the citizen in such a regime differs in two main respects from their role in a purely representative regime: "Public's judgment takes on a binding character in shorter intervals of time, and it becomes issue-specific, i.e., much more precise" (Kriesi 2005: 5).

The institutional roles which are given to citizens in their respective systems are assumed to influence their political attitudes and behavior. Here, their effects on political participation are of particular interest. We define political participation as comprising all

voluntary activities of citizens which refer to government and politics in the broadest sense and are not restricted to specific levels or areas of politics (van Deth 2003: 170-171).

With the exception of some studies, there is an overwhelming support in extant research for a positive relationship between direct democratic institutions and voter turnout (e.g., Freitag & Stadelmann-Steffen 2010: 480; Kriesi 2005: 12; Smith & Tolbert 2004: 50). This positive effect of direct democracy is assumedly even larger when a broader view of political participation is taken. If deliberating politics and partaking in an information campaign are considered political participation, the higher level of participation in a direct democracy could be attributed to frequent opportunities to enter politics. However, there is also a second explanation. The effect of direct democratic institutions on political participation could also be indirect, with internal political efficacy as an important mediator. Internal political efficacy is a person's self-perceived ability to understand politics and influence the political process (e.g. Semetko & Valkenburg 1998).

Direct-democratic procedures have a positive effect on internal efficacy because they educate politically in four ways. First, direct democratic institutions allow for experiencing direct personal influence and reinforce the belief that one is capable of affecting policy outcomes. Feeling capable of influencing politics is a key prerequisite for political participation (e.g. Masslo 2010: 74-75). Second, the repeated exposure to referenda and initiatives leads to a repeated actualization of knowledge about the issue placement of political actors and ones' personal issue stance. Thinking about the issue at stake and the probable position of the parties involved before taking a voting decision makes citizens feel more and more competent about what is going and raises their internal political efficacy further. Third, research has shown that referenda and initiatives trigger political discussions of policy issues and stimulate citizens to seek for additional political information (Kriesi 2005). One of the most important sources of political information is arguably the news media. Fourth, and related, referenda and initiatives are preceded by policy-centered information campaigns in which the issues at stake are explained and debated in the media. Their issue-oriented coverage, too, raises internal political efficacy (Bowler & Donovan 2002; Freitag &

Stadelmann-Steffen 2010; Kriesi 2005: 8). For all four reasons we expect to find higher levels of political participation in a direct democracy.

Both, the opportunity to participate and the act of participation itself promote political efficacy (Bowler & Donovan 2002: 376-377; Kriesi 2005: 12; Papadopoulos 1998: 161). The very act of participation can elevate internal political efficacy in two ways, direct and indirect. The direct link works via the accumulation of participation-experience, hence the use of these opportunities. The second link works through perceived interactivity, meaning that the experience of participation (i.e. interactivity) gives rise to a sense of efficacy also in those people who are outside onlookers and not participating themselves (see Bucy & Newhagen 1999; Bucy 2005). In general it can be added that the effect of referenda and initiatives, i.e. policy decisions, on internal political efficacy is expected to be greater than the effect of elections to select representatives because electing representatives mediates the relation between citizens and the policy outcome (Bowler & Donovan 2002).

The media in direct democracies

The role played by the media in a direct democracy differs on some dimensions from the role played by the media in representative democracies. Media coverage in the context of direct-democratic decisions is distinctively issue-related and fairly extensive over the entire campaign period (Gerth, Dahinden & Siegert 2012; Linder, 2005). Issues are highlighted from many perspectives. In fact, the media output during direct democratic issue campaigns is reflective of a broader range of voices than media output during other times. Actors from associations, initiative committees and ordinary citizens are represented in the media as frequently as established political actors (Marcinkowski 2007). The actors which enter the political communication process during direct democratic campaigns differ from those who enter the process during election campaigns. The actors in the former case stem mainly from the policy field of the respective issue area. Their influence on political decisions becomes transparent whereas this is lesser the case in representative democracies (Mittendorf 2009). The media also 'rearrange' the political landscape in their reporting since parties and other

actors join forces in sometimes unlikely coalitions, rallying in favor or against a proposal (de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). In general election campaigns, the discussion of issues is less salient than in direct democratic initiative campaigns (Mittendorf 2009). Moreover, direct democratic institutions produce more frequent and regular occasions for issue coverage than representative systems do (Kriesi 2005, 2012; Marcinkowski 2007).

We can conclude that political coverage in direct democracies frequently deals with political issues in a characteristically informative, inclusive manner. Being exposed to this kind of media coverage could therefore have a positive influence on the feeling to be qualified to participate in politics. Thus, direct democracy's political communication enhances internal efficacy by facilitating knowledge accumulation and strengthening perceived interactivity and inclusiveness. Internal political efficacy, in turn, is strongly correlated with political participation, and therefore central to the explanation of political participation (see Bonfadelli & Friemel 2012; Burns et al. 2001; Delli Carpini 2004; Masslo 2010).

The contingent nature of political participation: towards a research model

The opportunity to participate, the participatory experience, and the media – all of which are expected to foster internal political efficacy in direct democracies – are intricately related. This becomes more obvious when we reiterate our broad definition of political participation applied here. In this understanding, not only launching an initiative or referendum, collecting signatures or signing one oneself, or the public's voting on it are opportunities to participate and hence collect political experience. The specific media reporting bears additional, non-institutionalized opportunities to become involved due to its inclusiveness and comprehensiveness. These opportunities to participate comprise many forms like writing reader's letters, giving interviews to journalists or planning activities in order to get media coverage (Kriesi 1994; Marcinkowski 2007).

Mainly due to the Internet (and other interactive media formats like political talk radio, political call-in shows, political entertainment television), media exposure in some instances can no longer be viewed as just a matter of information-seeking and absorption but rather an

impetus for more active forms of involvement. Irrespective of political institutional factors, news use is increasingly participatory in nature. Consequently, the Internet is assumed to boost political participation directly but also indirectly through political efficacy (Bucy 2005: 108-119).

The inclusiveness and the participatory style are characteristics that are shared by political communication through the Internet and political communication in general during direct democratic campaigns. The question then is if direct democratic institutions still make a difference. For the arguments laid out so far it may be assumed that the answer is yes; Figure 1 illustrates these theoretical assumptions graphically. A crucial point is the concentration of the political discussions on a specific issue for a certain time. This creates a situation in which citizens are well-informed about exactly the issues at stake, which in turn raises citizen's ability for active interaction and the chance that one's voice about the issue is heard. Moreover, the general interactivity of today's mass media should not be overstated. Most citizens are, even online, not very active in their search for information and access usually those most easily available to them; only a select group of citizens get more actively involved in communication (Hindman 2009). The reporting style of easily available mainstream media is therefore assumed to make difference.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

From these considerations, we derive the following hypotheses:

H1: The level of political participation is higher in direct democratic institution contexts than in non direct democratic institution contexts.

H2: The relation between direct democratic institutions and participation is partly mediated by internal political efficacy.

Political communication and hence news media play a decisive role in these hypothesized relations. Therefore, the relation between direct democracy, internal political efficacy, and political participation should be more distinct among heavy news media users. From this, an additional hypothesis may be derived:

H3: The mediated relationship of direct democracy on political participation through internal political efficacy is moderated by news use.

Method

Our study compares two countries, the Netherlands and Switzerland. In the Netherlands, the data was collected through computer assisted web interviewing (CAWI) of 1653 Dutch respondents aged 15 to 18. The fieldwork took place between 16 June and 11 July 2010, directly after the Dutch general elections of June 9th in the same year. In Switzerland, data from 1657 respondents aged 15-18 was gathered via CAWI in the German and French speaking cantons. Here, the field time was from 13 October to 17 November 2010.

The response rate in the first wave was 61% in the Netherlands and 77% in Switzerland. The estimated time to fill in the questionnaire is 20-25 minutes. The questionnaire covered questions concerning media use, civic norms, political knowledge, and political attitudes and behavior. Comparing the sample data with census data we found only small deviations in terms of age, gender and region from the general population in both countries. Data collection was executed by GfK, an opinion research institute that complies with both ISO 20252 and ESOMAR guidelines for survey research..

Measures. The dependent variable, political participation, is measured using a sum scale of 21 individual items that measure different types of political activities and include both offline and online engagement (α : .841, M: 4.42, SD: 4.59). (see appendix for the exact question wording). All individual items were measured on a three point scale (0= no engagement, 1=occasional engagement, 2=frequent engagement). Voting in general was not included as a political activity since most respondents had not reached the voting age of 18 yet.

At the contextual level we include a country dummy tapping direct democratic institutional context (Switzerland) or the de facto absence of this (the Netherlands)². At the individual level, internal political efficacy is measured by the item "Politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on". News use is measured by frequency of

exposure to the main evening news broadcast. The format of television news programs is highly similar in both countries. It is also the most frequently used source of political information for adolescents in both samples, and its use correlates significantly with all other forms of news consumption. Age, gender, education level, social class, parental education level, political interest and political knowledge are included as control variables. Political knowledge is measured by summing up the correct answers to four general questions about democracy and politics.

Analysis. The potential mediation and moderated mediation effects are analyzed by applying the procedure introduced by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). The advantage of this procedure compared to conventional mediation analysis is that it uses bootstrapping, meaning random re-sampling of the provided data, to assess the confidence intervals of indirect effects. This method creates a random sample that is a valid base for the test statistic. Moderating effects are tested by including a moderator variable in the ordinary least squares regression.

Results

A first straight-forward comparison of the sum indices of political engagement in Switzerland, a direct democracy, and the Netherlands, a representative democracy, yields a significant difference. The mean level of engagement in Switzerland is 5.8 (SE: .114) as opposed to 3.1 (SE: .102) in the Netherlands. This supports Hypothesis 1.

In line with Hypothesis 2 we find strong evidence in support of our assumed causal mechanism: internal political efficacy indeed mediates the relationship between direct democracy and political engagement of adolescents. In Table 1 we present the results of the OLS regression analysis predicting the dependent variable political engagement. There are a number of noteworthy insignificant control variables. Age, gender, political knowledge, and parental education are insignificant in explaining the level of political engagement among adolescents. Social class, on the other hand, is a significant predictor: the higher the social status of a respondent the more likely he or she was to be involved in political activities. The general school level (education) is very influential, as is political interest when it comes to

explaining adolescents political engagement. Those respondents that feel competent enough to understand the political world (internal efficacy) also participate more. Among all tested factors, this variable has the highest t-value, except for the influence of the country, implying that internal political efficacy is a more reliable predictor of political engagement than for example political knowledge or social class.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The indirect effect of direct democracy on engagement through internal political efficacy is estimated to be significant ($b=.12$, $SE: .040$) (95% bca CI: .04; UL: .20). This means we can speak of partial mediation. That is confirmed by a Sobel test which checks whether the estimated indirect effect is different from zero (3.42**). The result implies that Swiss adolescents feel more competent about politics which motivates them to engage in political activities.

As a potential explanation for these findings we have proposed that a different reporting style in political news could lead to higher level of perceived political competence in a direct democracy. We tested this hypothesis as a moderated mediation model in which we examine whether or not the effect of direct democracy depends on internal political efficacy, and hence political participation depends on individual media use. Table 2 presents the result of this test.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The significant interaction term in the mediator variable model is evidence in support of the causal mechanism proposed in Hypothesis 3. To illustrate this finding Figure 2 shows the magnitude of the indirect effect of direct democracy through internal political efficacy on political participation depending on news use. As we can see in this figure, the size of the indirect effect nearly doubles when low and high news use are compared.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Conclusion and Discussion

Our analysis began with the realization that Swiss teenagers participate significantly more in political activities than Dutch adolescents. What might be the reason for this observation? We propose that the cause is located at the systemic level. Switzerland is a democracy with strong direct democratic institutions whereas the Netherlands lack regular opportunities for direct involvement of the people, an important difference between otherwise quite similar countries.

However, the causal mechanism that connects these two factors – direct democratic institutions on the systemic level and individual political participation – is fairly complicated. By relying on survey data collected among over 1600 adolescents in each of the two countries, our study suggests that living in a society that is characterized by many direct democratic acts increases the feeling of being qualified to participate in politics more than in representative democracies. There are two main reasons for this finding. On the one hand direct democratic institutions like initiatives and referenda offer ample opportunities to participate and make one's voice heard, and they mobilize citizens to cast ballots regularly on issues they care about. On the other hand, the effect of direct democratic institutions on political participation is mediated through internal political efficacy. We argue, that direct democracy enhances internal political efficacy through the opportunity of experience, through repeated knowledge actualization, through promotion of discussion and information seeking, and – associated with these reasons – through the media's issue-oriented reporting style

Our results are in line with research on direct democracy and internal political efficacy conducted among adults (Bowler & Donovan 2002; Smith & Tolbert 2004). With regard to the role of the media, we suggest that in a direct democracy, the media discusses issues extensively and repeatedly during a certain period of time, and from the perspective of a broad range of actors. We therefore assumed that the mediated influence of direct democratic institutions on political participation is more distinct among those who consume news more frequently.

To test our hypothesis we included news use as a moderating variable to the mediation model. Our analysis showed that the mediation of direct democratic institutions through internal political efficacy on political participation is indeed conditional on news use. Therefore our hypotheses were supported. This result is remarkable because fieldwork in the Netherlands was executed during the national election campaign, an event which is also assumed to raise media's attention to politics and boost participation. However, our results are consistent with those theorists who point out that election campaigns appeal lesser to the young who perform to new citizenship norms. Elections are an indirect form of participation which are to a lesser extent issue related and therefore more appealing to duty-based citizenship norms (Dalton 2006: 64, 2008: 5).

Our study has a number of shortcomings. First, even though a number of relevant variables like education and socio demographic background are included to control for spurious relationships, there still might be alternative explanations and causal models for our findings. With an adjusted R^2 of .16 there is still room to improve the specification of our model. Second, a Most Similar Cases Design can only hint at causal influence on the systemic level but not fully prove it. Our findings would have to be confirmed in other cases to make the proposed causal mechanism fully empirically valid. Last but not least, the direction of the causal influences in our model can be debated. As mentioned above, the relation between internal political efficacy and political participation is reciprocal. Recent research in the field of media effects alludes to a spiral form of influence (see Delli Carpini 2004; Slater 2007). Media use influences political activity and efficacy which influences media use. Future longitudinal research could investigate these relationships more thoroughly.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, our research has provided answer to some and raised interesting new questions about the influence of the political system on the likelihood to participate, and the role of the media therein. We have also shown that that political participation is much more than casting ballots, particularly for younger generations.. The relevance of the topic is underlined by Scarrow's (2001) finding, that direct democratic

institutions are more and more on the rise and further pushed in western democracies, and that these institutions provide opportunities for direct participation of citizens (see also Kriesi 2012). However, direct democratic institutions should not be seen uncritically as a panacea for bringing together engaged citizen's demands and democratic institutions. In some cases of institutionalized direct democracy it is up to the power holders to decide when to consult the people, and they may only do it when it suits them

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Footnotes

1. Initiatives can be launched by groups of voters to put certain issues to the vote. Referendums challenge decisions of those who govern by putting the subject matter (law, international treaty, constitutional amendment, constitution) to a popular vote. Referendums can be obligatory (i.e. required in a law-making process) or facultative (i.e. launched by motivated groups of voters).
2. In principle, national referendums in the Netherlands are not possible by law. However in order to hold the 2005 referendum on the treaty establishing a constitution for the European Union, a temporary law was put in place as the result of an initiative proposal by three parliamentarians.

Table 1

Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Political Participation (N = 3259)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>b</i>
Constant	-3.58**	1.205	
Internal political efficacy	-.16	.046	.065
Direct democracy	2.34**	.154	.260
Age	.01	.069	.004
Gender	.28	.149	.032
Education	.30**	.093	.059
Parental education	.08	.094	.016
Social class	.19*	.101	.034
News use	.11**	.034	.060
Political knowledge	.036	.064	.010
Political interest	.76**	.050	.288

Note: Adjusted R-square = .161

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting the Mediator, Internal Political Efficacy (N = 3062)

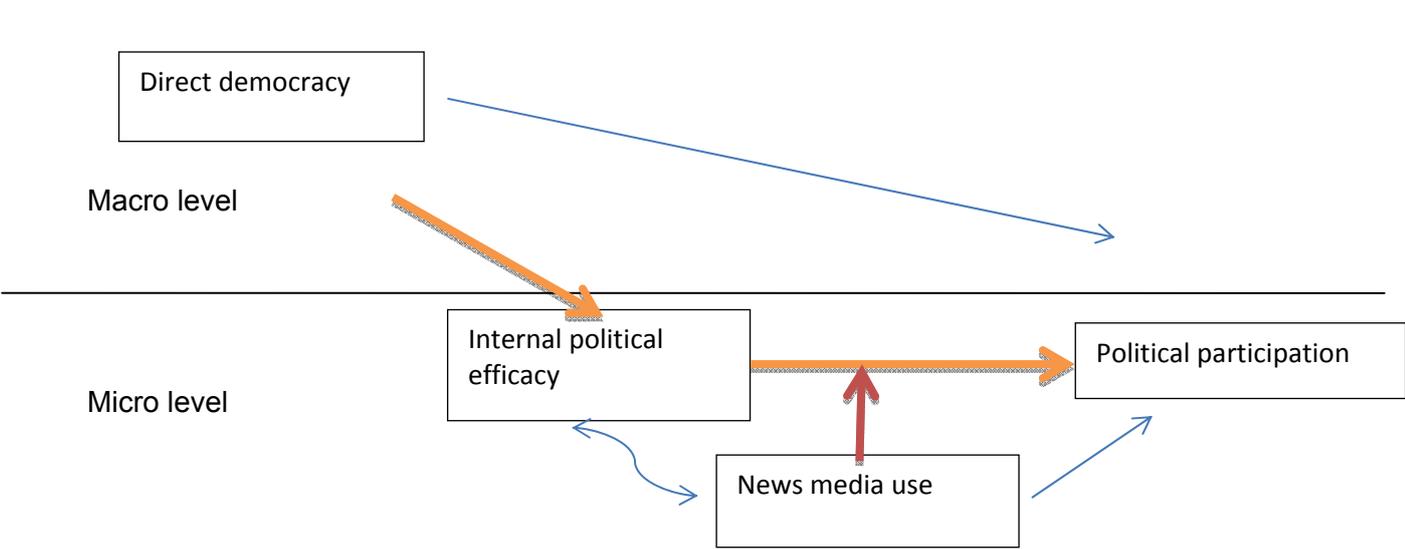
Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>b</i>
Direct democracy	-.48	.092	-.13**
News use	.11	.039	.14*
Country*news	-.09	.025	-.20**
Age	-.005	.027	-.003
Gender	.52	.058	.14**
Education	-.24	.036	-.11**
Parental education	.05	.037	.02
Social class	-.08	.039	-.03*
Political knowledge	-.05	.025	-.04*
Political interest	-.33	.018	-.31**
Constant	5.30**	.474	

Note: Adjusted R-square: .243.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1

Illustration of Underlying Research Logic

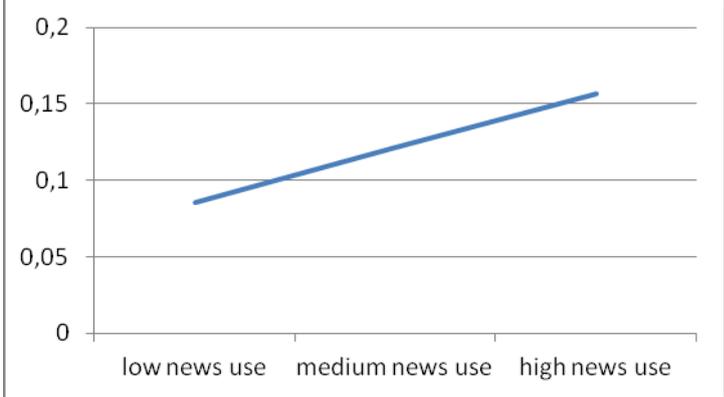


Orange path: mediation

Red path: moderation

Figure 2

Strength of Indirect Effect (Direct Democracy on Political Engagement through Internal Political Efficacy) Depending on News Use



Appendix

Variable	Operationalisation/ Original Question wording
Political Participation	<p><i>For the activities below, please indicate which ones you have ever done.</i></p> <p><i>Uploaded a political or social video on Facebook / YouTube</i></p> <p><i>Boycotted certain products for political or social reasons</i></p> <p><i>Chatted or twittered about politics</i></p> <p><i>Voted in student elections</i></p> <p><i>Participated in political demonstrations</i></p> <p><i>Written/put political messages on walls (graffiti, stickers, posters)</i></p> <p><i>Collected signatures (for a petition, referendum, or initiative)</i></p> <p><i>Signed an online petition</i></p> <p><i>Contributed to a political discussion on the internet (for example in a forum, as a comment)</i></p> <p><i>Attended a campaign event</i></p> <p><i>Wore a t-shirt with a political/social message</i></p> <p><i>Bought certain products for political or social reasons (e.g. fair trade, organic, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>Donated money, for example to Greenpeace</i></p> <p><i>Initiate an online discussion</i></p> <p><i>Organized an online petition</i></p> <p><i>Worked on a campaign</i></p> <p><i>Joined a cause at Facebook</i></p> <p><i>Forwarded email, video or link with political content (for example to mobilize for political activity)</i></p> <p><i>Collect money for a political or social organization, for example to Greenpeace</i></p> <p><i>Posted a blog entry about a political/social cause</i></p>

	<p><i>Send an email to a politician or a political organisation</i></p> <p>Answers: Never=0; Occasionally=1; Frequently=2</p> <p>Sum of 21 individual answers</p> <p>α: .841, M: 4.42, SD: 4.59</p> <p>NL: α: .866, M:3.07, SD: 4,13</p> <p>CH: α: .806, M:5.77, SD:4,63</p>
Political Efficacy	<p><i>Please consider the following statements about politics in general. Could you please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of them?</i></p> <p><i>Politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on</i></p> <p>Answers: Scale from Strongly agree=0 to Strongly disagree=6</p> <p>M: 3.14, SD: 1.81</p> <p>NL: M: 3.56, SD: 1.74</p> <p>CH: M: 2.71, SD: 1.79</p>
News Use	<p><i>In a typical week, on how many days do you watch any of the following TV programs?</i></p> <p>Swiss questionnaire:</p> <p><i>Tagesschau, 10 vor 10, Schweiz aktuell (SF), Le journal, Journal romand (TSR)</i></p> <p>Dutch questionnaire:</p> <p><i>NOS Journaal</i></p> <p>Answers: 0 days=0; 1 day=1; 2 days=2; 3 days=3; 4 days=4; 5 days=5; 6 days=6; 7 days=7</p> <p>M: 2.78, SD: 2.27</p> <p>NL: M: 2.83, SD: 2.38</p> <p>CH: M: 2.73, SD: 2.16</p>

Age	<p>Self reported age of respondent in years, surveyed during recruitment process</p> <p>M: 16.48, SD: 1.10</p> <p>NL: M: 16.52, SD: 1.10</p> <p>CH: M: 16.43, SD: 1.10</p>
Gender	<p>Self reported sex of respondent in years; surveyed during recruitment process</p> <p><i>Female=1, Male=2</i></p> <p>M:1.51, SD: 0.5</p> <p>NL: M:1.52, SD: 0.5</p> <p>CH: M:1.51, SD: 0.5</p>
Education level	<p>Current education (highest completed education if currently not in education), surveyed during recruitment process</p> <p>Switzerland:</p> <p><i>Primary school=1, Secondary school, basic apprenticeship=2, Apprenticeship, business school, vocational education=3; Grammar school (incl. "Berufsmaturität")=4; College, university=5:</i></p> <p>M: 3.31, SD: .89</p> <p>NL: M: 3.45, SD: .94</p> <p>CH: 3.18, SD: .78</p>
Social Class	<p><i>How would you describe the social class of the family in which you grew up?</i></p> <p>Answers: <i>Lower class=0; Working class=1; Under middleclass=2; Upper middleclass=3; Upper class=4</i></p> <p>M: 2.49, SD: .78</p>

	<p>NL: M: 2.54, SD: .79</p> <p>CH: M: 2.44, SD: .76</p>
Parental education level	<p><i>What is the highest level of education your father has completed?</i></p> <p>Answers: <i>Primary school, secondary school=0; Apprenticeship vocational education=1; Grammar school=2; College, university =3;</i></p> <p>M: 2.10, SD: .82</p> <p>NL: M: 2.24, SD: .76</p> <p>CH: M: 1.97, SD: .84</p>
Political knowledge	<p>Sum of correct answers to the following four political knowledge questions</p> <p>(Source of questions: IEA Civic Education Study; online: http://www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~jtputra/)</p> <p><i>In democratic countries what is the function of having more than one political party?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>To represent different opinions (interests) in the Parliament</i> - <i>To limit political corruption</i> - <i>To prevent political demonstrations</i> - <i>To encourage economic competition</i> - <i>Don't know</i> <p><i>What is the major purpose of the United Nations?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Safeguarding trade between countries</i> - <i>Maintaining peace and security among countries</i> - <i>Deciding where countries' boundaries should be</i> - <i>Keeping criminals from escaping to other countries</i>

	<p>- <i>Don't know</i></p> <p><i>The government has lowered tax rates on income from interest and investment (finance income) and raised tax rates on salaries. A large group carried signs in protest in front of the government's buildings. The protesters are most likely to be ...</i></p> <p><i>...people who have large savings accounts.</i></p> <p><i>...people who own shares in companies.</i></p> <p><i>...unemployed people who receive government benefits.</i></p> <p><i>...people who are employed in factories.</i></p> <p>- <i>Don't know</i></p> <p><i>A country has a declining birth rate and an increasing life span. Which of the following problems will have to be solved as a result?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Schools need to be built</i> - <i>Pensions for the elderly have to be financed</i> - <i>Low income housings have to be built</i> - <i>Crime and violence have to be combated</i> <p>- <i>Don't know</i></p> <p>α: .641, M: 2.66, SD: 1.27</p> <p>NL: α: .698, M: 2.76, SD: 1.18</p> <p>CH: α: .565, M: 2.66, SD: 1.27</p>
Political interest	<p><i>Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?</i></p> <p>Answers: Scale from <i>not interested at all=0</i> to <i>very interested=6</i></p> <p>M: 2.86, SD: 1.71</p> <p>NL: M: 2.63, SD: 1.77</p> <p>CH: M: 3.09, SD: 1.62</p>

