

## Chapter 11

# ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AND NON-ELECTORAL PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, various observations have been interpreted as indicating that democracy might be in crisis or endangered, including in the European Union. This crisis has multiple dimensions: from a deep and steady decline in citizens' trust in political parties and representative institutions, such as parliaments and executive governments, to the rise of illiberal democracies and far-right, neo-fascist political parties, to the emergence of (left-wing and right-wing) populism, and to the social fragmentation and polarization of our societies and the subsequent deterioration of our public deliberation and political life in the public sphere. Our democratic life is dangerously weakening everywhere. In this critical context, finding ways to strengthen electoral participation, even though it may not be the only path to a solution, should be an absolute priority to reconstitute our democratic systems. Efforts in this direction are happening at European, national, and local levels.

Despite its significance, it is not obvious what strengthening electoral participation means, and whether policies towards achieving this objective have a meaningful impact. In contrast to the attention paid to increasing turnout in elections and despite being essential for strengthening electoral participation, significantly less has been said about the quality of electoral participation. Many scholars have proposed non-electoral citizen engagement and participation as a fundamental strategy for reconstructing democracy (Habermas, 1989; Geißel and Joas, 2013; Smith, 2009; Lafont 2020; among others), and we agree that deepening or strengthening democracy requires expanding the opportunities for citizens to participate in public decision making well beyond their periodic involvement in electoral processes. There is a growing literature studying these forms of citizen participation, from the more traditional ones, like citizen initiatives, public hearings, and consultations, to novel ones, like citizen assemblies, citizen juries, participating in online platforms, and mechanisms of crowdlaw and crowdsourced civic engagement (see Fung 2003, 2006, 2009; Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Alsina and Martí, 2018; Landemore 2020). Part of this literature has addressed the difficult question of measuring the quality of participatory processes (Smith

2009, Geißel, 2013). Comparisons of varieties of non-electoral participation, such as citizen assemblies and mini-publics in general vs. popular voting processes like referendums and initiatives (el-Wakil and McKay 2020; el-Wakil 2020; el-Wakil and Strebel 2021; Stone 2021) are increasingly frequent in recent literature. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in covering the connection between non-electoral participatory processes and strengthening electoral participation. The fundamental question is: Do non-electoral participatory processes have a positive impact in strengthening the quantity and quality of electoral participation, and, if so, under what conditions? This question is of utmost importance, given how central electoral processes are for the legitimacy of our democracies. We will not be able to provide a definitive answer to this question. Our research is an attempt to clarify some key issues related to it, as well as to assess some existing policies at European, national and local levels aiming to strengthen electoral participation.

## **2. APPROACH**

The general objective of the REDEM project has been to investigate aspects of reconstructing democracy in times of crises from a voter-centred perspective. There can be no democracy without citizens, as there can be no democracy without elections and voting procedures. Better understanding how citizens in general, and voters in particular, engage in their political actions, as well as clarifying their rights, duties, and responsibilities, have traditionally been central tasks for democratic theory, and they need critical updating in times of new, multiple and overlapping crises. In this context, we have been particularly interested in exploring in depth ethical commitments which voters should adopt in a well-functioning democracy. We have also been interested in how expectations on citizens' skills, attitudes, judgments and ways to act on information might have an impact on strengthening democracy and on improving its quality. We have called this the ethical voter-centred approach.

We have tried to connect the voter-centred approach to a wider view of citizen participation, based on the assumption that the ethical rights, duties, and responsibilities of voters in a democracy should be present in other forms of citizen participation, and be compatible and mutually reinforcing under a coherent general view of the role of citizens in contemporary democracies. Recent literature on democratic theory and innovations has discussed the centrality of periodic elections. It has also stressed the importance of non-electoral citizen participation for the legitimacy of our democratic systems, whether in general voting - but non-electoral - processes, such as referendums or initiatives, or in more limited deliberative settings such as citizen assemblies or citizen juries. More traditional understandings of representative democracy, which basically restricted the role of citizens to voting in periodic elections, have been enhanced with wider and more complex ideas of a democratic system in which, in addition to elections, citizens' choices may be expressed through a variety of other processes and contexts. These recent developments, however, should not be seen as alternatives to the election of representatives by citizens, which remains a central concern of democratic theory.

This chapter focuses on advancing research on ways in which citizens' electoral participation can be enhanced or strengthened. This participation suffers today from several shortcomings and weaknesses which correlate with factors such as the decline of citizens' trust in democratic institutions and of adherence to democratic values. Concerned with these

shortcomings and weaknesses, as well as with a more general crisis of democracy, authorities at European, national, and local level are trying to design specific policies that aim to strengthen electoral participation. Such policies deserve a closer analysis and assessment, especially from the perspective of a voter-centred approach.

The challenge of identifying ways to strengthen citizen participation can be approached from several perspectives, and it requires knowledge from disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology, and political and legal philosophy. The project meetings and conferences have regularly brought together experts from these disciplines, in addition to practitioners such as politicians, think tank professionals, and activists and citizens engaged in civic associations. This chapter too has been developed in line with this overall interdisciplinary research approach.

The REDEM project did not include empirical research activities. Therefore, the nature of our research work has been mainly theoretical, and the chapter relies on existing empirical evidence, as well as on the views of experts and practitioners involved in REDEM project activities. Nevertheless, in doing so, we also aimed to make our findings relevant for subsequent and much needed empirical research and practical applications.

To conclude, this chapter adopts the general voter-centered perspective of the REDEM project but connects this particular angle with a wider view of democratic participation and engagement. Specifically, it explores how citizen participation might be enhanced in ways that enhance the quality of voting procedures and elections. The underlying research is interdisciplinary and practically-oriented, and it aimed to be based on the best empirical evidence available.

### **3. THE IDEA OF STRENGTHENING ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION**

Democracy is one of the foundational values on which the European Union (EU) is based. It is a core European value and a precondition for any state that aspires to be part of the EU. It is a system which allows citizens to shape and reshape their destiny by casting laws and public policies. Democracy is the only political system that allows people to live under their own terms in conditions of freedom and political equality, and for that reason it is the only political system that can be deemed morally legitimate (Pettit 2012). In current democratic theory, there is almost unanimous agreement that a purely direct democracy, which has never existed but is now and for once empirically possible, is not a desirable ideal for real world's democracies. Even if so-called representative democracy has been under substantial theoretical and practical criticism in the last decades, the shared view among all democratic theorists is that any form of legitimate democracy must incorporate representative institutions at its core. Some recent literature questions the centrality of elections and electoral representation by arguing for alternative forms of representation, e.g., lottery or random selection of non-professional representatives (Fishkin, 2011; Landemore, 2020; among many others). Such proposals for democratic innovation remain minoritarian and they do leave some role for periodic elections. Elections and citizens participating in them remain an essential part of democracy, not only in its present-day forms, but also in forms that democratic theorists are envisioning for tomorrow (Urbinati, 2006; Christiano, 2008; Pettit, 2012; Lafont, 2020; Wolkenstein, 2023).

From a more practical perspective, all attempts to measure the degree of democracy or the legitimacy of political systems, including well-known rankings such as the Democracy Index or the V-Dem index, use a variety of indicators reflecting the quality of democratic systems that go beyond citizen electoral participation. Free and periodic elections and the conditions of voting in those elections area among the most critical elements used to evaluate the strength of democracy. Trying to enhance citizen participation, should therefore focus on electoral participation in conjunction with considering other forms of participation not necessarily as subsidiary, but as potentially complementary.

The idea that allowing people to live under their own terms requires people's involvement in electoral as well as non-electoral forms of participation is supported by theoretical arguments of political scientists subscribing to a variety of perspectives, as well as by empirical evidence. Substantial attention has been paid to ways in which we might enhance non-electoral citizen participation, as well as to identifying the factors that determine its quality. Surprisingly, scholars have recently paid much less attention to methods to strengthen electoral participation, or even to what strengthening electoral participation might mean, especially when it comes to looking at more qualitative aspects that go beyond attempts to increase voter turnout. Finally, almost no research has been conducted on how both kinds of participation, electoral and non-electoral, connect to each other, and, more particularly, on whether and how citizen non-electoral participation might help enhance not only the quantity, but also the quality of their electoral participation.

Allowing people to live on their own terms implies that their participation in democratic political life must be meaningful.<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, self-evident that people will always play a meaningful role in the government and administration of their polities. Two distinct perils have recently been identified in relation to the challenges of participation in democracies: the weaknesses of democracy (Dalton et. al., 2006; Habermas, 1973) and the democratic backsliding (Przeworski, 2019; Wolkenstein, 2022). While the first phenomenon refers to the lack of democratic legitimacy of governments, the low level of trust in politicians, or the increasing reluctance of citizens to vote, the second phenomenon is related to the rise of populism and illiberal democracies. Put differently, the weaknesses of democracy affect it from the inside, whereas democratic backsliding is the consequence of external processes. Apart from having an impact on democracy itself, both phenomena also affect electoral participation.

As John Dewey first (Dewey, 2012) and Jürgen Habermas later (Habermas, 1973) explained, having a non-institutional but rich and vivid public sphere, in which citizens may engage beyond their participation in periodic elections, is essential to the strength, stability and quality of our democratic systems. The decline in civic life that can be observed in most current democratic systems (Putnam, 2000), and the impoverishment of the quality of

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<sup>1</sup> People should be able to make their own choices without the danger of interference by being manipulation, replacement or misrepresentation. In terms of electoral participation, this requires securing freedom of expression, freedom of information and a plural and strong civil society. People should be allowed to participate in periodic elections to choose their representatives, but they should also be involved in a more dynamic and permanent manner in what has recently been described as 'participatory democratic innovations.' (See Smith, 2009; Geißel, 2012, 2013).

public debate fueled, among other factors, by the emergence of social media (Benkler et al., 2018), affect an important part of citizens' democratic life, and also have an impact on their involvement in periodic elections and the quality of democratic institutions. The two worlds are connected by democratic institutions requiring active, well-informed and politically engaged citizens, able to meaningfully participate in several forms of democratic decision-making processes. Citizens' increasing lack of trust and interest, their growing disengagement from public issues, and their feeling that democratic politics is not inherently connected to their lives, rights and duties, has a devastating effect on both their institutional and non-institutional political life (Dalton et al., 2006).

On the other hand, the rise of populism, illiberal democracies, and the far-right are threatening to change the traditional approach to elections and voting processes. Instead of seeing them as an opportunity for citizens to pass judgment and impose direction on democratic institutions after examining political issues and publicly deliberating on them, populism extends the idea that elections are simply a confrontational means to gain power in which diverse views of society compete for hegemony. In populism this is an end that justifies any means, such as ideological manipulation, the use of fake news, or even disloyalty to democratic and fair procedures through attempts to rig the elections or to raise suspicion that they have been rigged by others. (Laclau, 2005; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017; Mouffe, 2018)

Electoral participation remains central for the quality and legitimacy of our democratic systems. The idea of strengthening electoral participation, however, has been largely overlooked by experts and recent scholarly literature. At this point, some relevant distinctions may clarify the conceptual background in which public policies oriented to enhance that participation should operate.

The first relevant distinction is the one between quantitative and qualitative factors. An obvious way in which electoral participation might be enhanced is by adopting strategies oriented to increase voter turnout. Lower voter turnout has traditionally been identified as a clear indicator of citizen disengagement and as potentially undermining the democratic legitimacy of representative institutions. The purely quantitative goal of increasing voter turnout, therefore, has been identified as one of the main focuses in most institutional policies that tackle crisis issues of democracy.

Important as the quantitative aspects of strengthening electoral participation are, there is a wide variety of qualitative dimensions that should also be taken into account. The issue of the quality of voting has been largely ignored by the literature on citizen participation. One might even think of it as a taboo issue. This may be explained by the fact that assessing the quality of voting seems to be equated with the ability to assess whether the particular ballot cast by every citizen has been the correct choice or not. This is not only impossible given the secrecy of voting, but also very dangerous, precisely in a democratic system where the value of pluralism prevents us from passing judgment on correct political choices in elections. No substantive standard of correctness can be taken for granted.

However, there is another way of evaluating the quality of voting that does not depend on having a substantive standard of correctness. It consists in identifying the main elements that stand for quality of electoral participation on a more general level, and then verifying to what extent those conditions obtain in different contexts. One of the limitations of our

research is that it was not mandated to engage in empirical research on this issue. However, our aim has been to provide an adequate theoretical framework to conduct such empirical research in the future.

When identifying conditions that affect the quality of electoral participation, it is important to introduce another relevant distinction which consists in differentiating procedural conditions, background conditions, and individual conditions. The scholarly literature on elections have tended to mainly focus on the first type of conditions, somewhat less on the second one, and has largely overlooked the third one.

The procedural conditions of the quality of electoral participation refer to the relevant features of the electoral process itself, and they have been largely studied by political scientists. They are related to the principles of democratic inclusion, guaranteeing that nobody is excluded from participating, not only formally but also in other indirect ways, and to electoral integrity - the set of principles that must govern electoral processes to ensure that they are fair and trustworthy (Norris, 2017). Ensuring inclusion and electoral integrity is obviously critical for a well-functioning representative democracy. Contrary to what one might think, in most contemporary advanced democratic systems there still are weaknesses in this area, such as underrepresentation of certain social groups, or shortcomings in electoral integrity. Thus, in addition to the goal of increasing voter turnout, it is essential that our democracies adopt more ambitious policies oriented to strengthen these procedural qualitative conditions of electoral participation.

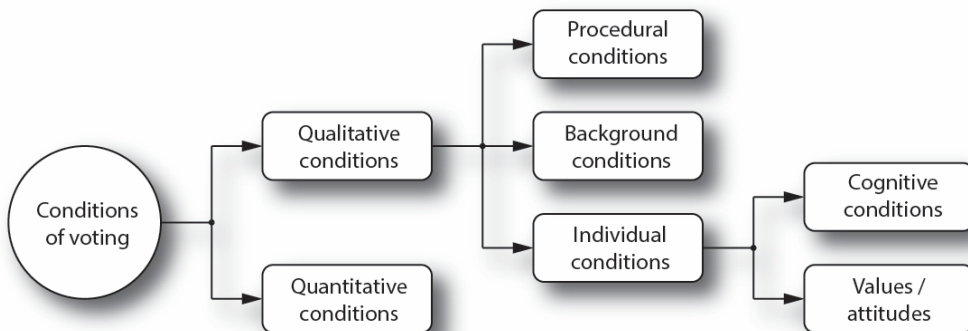
The background conditions are those objective conditions of the society and the institutional system in which the electoral processes take place. One of the background conditions for voting quality identified by all indexes and rankings of democracy is the effective respect for fundamental democratic freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of thought, and freedom of association, among others. Another important background condition is a well-functioning rule of law based on separation of powers and institutional accountability. Public transparency is also crucial, since voters need to have access to all relevant information to form solid political judgments that may orient their voting choices. In addition, and rightly identified by the European Democracy Action Plan, a critical background condition for the quality of voting is a rich and vivid media system that complements public transparency and contributes to holding public authorities accountable for their decisions and actions. Perhaps the most important background condition is the existence of a vibrant and robust public deliberation, one mediated by a strong media system. As we shall see in subsequent sections, all these background conditions have been correctly identified by both the scholarly literature on democratic theory, particularly the one on deliberative democracy, and by the European and national institutional policies that aim to strengthen democracy in general and electoral participation in particular.

Finally, the individual conditions of the quality of voting are those conditions that characterize voters individually and empower them to vote in a wiser or more meaningful way. From a theoretical perspective, there is no doubt that the quality of voting depends, in addition to the other two types of conditions, on certain capacities and attitudes that voters must possess individually. The underlying general idea is that better citizens make better choices and votes. And here it is important to introduce a final relevant distinction between two types of individual conditions: first, cognitive conditions, such as the level of political

knowledge held by citizens, their ability to understand and contrast information, and form sound, informed, knowledgeable judgment on that basis, and their ability to reason and discuss with people who hold different views; and second, the democratic attitudes and values that are instrumental for a better electoral participation, such as the central democratic values of freedom, political equality and civility, respect for pluralism, commitment to the public interest or the common good, etc.

Both the cognitive conditions and the attitudes and values of voters crucially depend, among other factors, on an adequate system of civic and political education. Democracies have made various attempts to improve the level of civic and political education, and, even if this is a widely studied topic (Berinsky and Lenz, (2011; Galston, 2001; Gutmann, 1999; Persson, 2015; Willeck and Mendelberg, 2022), we lack of a commonly accepted integrating theoretical framework and good empirical research allowing us to identify those policies that are most successful in strengthening electoral participation. A system of civic and political education must obviously include specific subjects in the primary and secondary education system, as well as educative strategies aiming to develop the right kind of democratic values and attitudes among children. We should also not forget the idea of long-life learning and therefore we should try to design strategies to improve and develop adequate knowledge and cognitive capacities as well as values and attitudes among adult citizens. This integral approach is still largely missing both in the scientific literature and in the institutional policies enacted by our democratic systems.

Many of these cognitive and attitudinal individual conditions have been identified in the extensive literature on civic or political culture (Dalton, 2014; Dalton et al., 2001, 2004; Dalton and Welzel, 2014; Pateman, 2012; Pharr, Putnam and Dalton, 2000). However, there is no widespread agreement neither on the concrete factors that constitute civic or political culture, nor on the main indicators that might be used to measure it among citizens. In terms of political knowledge, for instance, it is common to test citizens' knowledge about political parties or leaders or the rules that govern representative bodies and elections. Important as this might be, however, it is obvious that knowing the names of the ministers in the cabinet, or the main items in a party's electoral program, or having an accurate idea of how the legislative process works is not all that matters when it comes to being able to make wise choices and to the quality voting.



Much more research is needed on the three types of conditions that may strengthen electoral participation, and more particularly on the third one, where the conceptual framework is still weak. Considering these deficits in the scholar literature, it is not surprising that the European and national policies oriented to strengthen electoral participation that we will review in the next two sections may come across as vague and incomplete.

#### 4. POLICIES FOR ENHANCING EUROPEAN ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

The EU has recently implemented several actions aiming to protect and enhance electoral participation. The *2020 EU Citizenship Report*, together with the *European Democracy Action Plan*, have set a framework of action to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies. These documents propose several concrete actions aiming at strengthening democratic participation. The *European Democracy Action Plan*, for instance, seeks at a general level to strengthen and support the resilience of EU democracies by tackling the digital transformation of democracies, acknowledging the benefits, but also the risks that online campaigning and online platforms present for election integrity. To ensure a free and plural media, and to protect the democratic process from misinformation and disinformation of political behavior and decision-making, democratic resilience should be strengthened by supporting free and independent media, by countering disinformation and by promoting free and fair elections and strong democratic participation.

Besides countering disinformation, the *European Democracy Action Plan* sets out as a goal the protection of electoral processes and the empowering of citizens in an open democratic debate. It does so by promoting free and fair elections and by strengthening media freedom. The European Commission (EC) has also set out its priorities in strengthening democratic participation by introducing in 2021 new rules on transparency in political advertising, by revising existing rules on the financing of European political parties in 2021, by setting up a new EU operational mechanism for electoral resilience, by promoting respect in the public debate and by fighting against online hate speech.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, the Commission explained that “maintaining democracy requires more determined action to protect electoral processes, preserve open democratic debate and update safeguards in the light of new digital realities. Democracy is about the richness of participatory practices, civic engagement and respect for democratic standards and the rule of law, applied throughout the electoral cycle.”<sup>3</sup> These policy priorities address some of the procedural and background conditions for strengthening electoral participation, such as the procedural conditions of electoral integrity and the background conditions of a healthy media system and of a robust public deliberation.

Measures to increase overall electoral participation focus largely on voting rights in elections for the European Parliament and support an effective electoral system and an informed and engaged electorate. This is evident from the report on the 2014 European elections,<sup>4</sup> in which

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<sup>2</sup> See European Commission, Joint Research Centre (2020), *Technology and democracy: understanding the influence of online technologies on political behavior and decision-making*. See also (Report on the implementation of the action plan against disinformation (JOIN(2019) 12 final, 14.6.2019).

<sup>3</sup> Brussels, 3.12.2020, COM (2020) 790 final. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

<sup>4</sup> See COM (2015) 206 final.



the Commission highlighted the need to examine the reasons for the persistently low turnout in European elections in some Member States and to find ways to remedy this situation. These measures aim to increase electoral participation but not only that, as they are also intended to improve citizens' participation in democratic life in the EU. There are several ways in which electoral participation can be enhanced. Efforts to increase turnout and make voting truly representative are derived mainly from the actions recommended by the European Union to its member states. These efforts can be categorised into (i) *general actions* aimed at increasing overall turnout, for example by intensifying citizens dialogues and by promoting public debates aiming to improve the public's understanding of the impact of the EU on the daily lives of citizens and to encourage the exchange of views between citizens; and (ii) *specific actions* aimed at increasing turnout among a particular segment of the citizenry, such as youth or women, or at enfranchising the disenfranchised, for instance by promoting best practices that help citizens vote and stand for office in EU elections, including retaining the right to vote when moving to another Member State, and by facilitating cross-border access to political news.

As part of general actions, and as part of the overall effort to ensure free and fair elections, the Commission adopted in September 2018 an electoral package calling on Member States to establish national election networks, involving national authorities responsible for electoral matters and authorities responsible for monitoring and enforcing rules on online activities related to elections. This recommendation has not had any national development yet. This European cooperation network on elections serves as a platform to warn of threats, share best practices, discuss common solutions to identified challenges, and promote joint projects and exercises between national networks. In terms of promoting the rights of EU citizens at the local level, the European Week of Regions and Cities serves as a forum for implementing the European Union's cohesion policy and demonstrates the importance of the local and regional level for good European governance.

In the 2020 EU Citizenship Report, the Commission highlight the importance of the promotion of European Union citizenship rights, which include electoral rights and full democratic participation, both in the context of the effective exercise of voting rights and of strengthening citizens' participation in the democratic process. This is in continuation of the 2017 EU Citizenship Report to promote and strengthen citizens' participation in the democratic life of the EU.<sup>5</sup> The 2020 Citizenship Report revealed that EU citizens are increasingly making use of their electoral rights: In the 2019 European Parliament elections turnout was 50.66%, up 8.05% compared to 2014 and the highest in two decades, largely due to young voters and first-time voters.

On a different track, but also with the aim of improving the reach and efficiency of the 2019 European Parliament elections, the Commission issued in 2018 a Recommendation (COM(2018)900 final) to competent national authorities inviting them to promote the exercise of the right to vote by underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, and overall to support democratic behaviour and the increase voter turnout. This addresses the principle of full and effective inclusion - another procedural condition for strengthening electoral participation.

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<sup>5</sup> See COM (2017) 30 final.

The Commission also asked for research into best practices for identifying, mitigating, and managing risks to the electoral process from cyberattacks and disinformation. Together with the general actions pursued to increase electoral participation, there are also specific actions aimed at specific segments of the population. These actions are designed, for example, to increase the participation of Roma people, persons with disabilities, women, young people, 'mobile' EU citizens and the disenfranchised, among others.

Increasing turnout in specific segments of citizenry brought 'mobile' citizens into focus.<sup>6</sup> Mobile citizens pose a particular challenge to electoral participation. They are a growing group of citizens who have moved to another Member State to live, work or study, but who have the right to vote and stand for election to the European Parliament. It is estimated that 13.3 million EU citizens live in an EU Member State that is not their country of origin, of which over 11 million are of voting age.<sup>7</sup> Although Council Directives 93/109/EC and 94/80/EC allow mobile Europeans to vote in European and local elections in their country of residence, and Member States have successfully transposed both directives, voter turnout of mobile citizens remains low compared to that of nationals. Member States have exchanged views on the problems they identified and on the solutions proposed to mitigate the risks and clarify the relevant provisions to ensure greater participation of mobile EU citizens. These include, for example, harmonizing the deadlines for exchanging information on their registration on electoral rolls, increasing the importance of campaigns to raise awareness among mobile EU citizens about registration on electoral rolls and informing them about their rights, and addressing the issue of double voting in a comprehensive manner.<sup>8</sup> The 2017 Citizenship Report took stock of how mobile citizens have exercised these rights since 2012 and charted ways to improve knowledge about democratic participation, to inform and to raise awareness among citizens about their rights, to simplify the electoral process, and to work with stakeholders to achieve these objectives. Key factors of success were the promotion of best practices helping citizens to vote and to stand for office in EU elections, including retaining the right to vote when moving to another Member State, and enhancing cross-border access to political news.

Despite the fact that under EU law every EU citizen has the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in the EU country where he or she resides under the same conditions as nationals of that state, there are still obstacles affecting the turnout of these voters in EU elections. As a result, there have been continuous efforts in recent years to increase their turnout, as well as to increase citizen participation in all stages of the democratic process, which is central to European democracy.

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<sup>6</sup> See 2017 Citizenship Report, the Commission published a report in February 2018 (COM /2018/044 final) on the right of EU citizens to vote and stand for office in local elections when living in another EU Member State.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)694233](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)694233). Accessed on February 20, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/minutes\\_28-29\\_january\\_2021.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/minutes_28-29_january_2021.pdf) Accessed on February 20, 2023.

In 2020, specific measures were taken to increase Roma voter participation. In particular, a new strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion and participation was adopted.<sup>9</sup> One of the objectives of this framework is to encourage participation of Roma in political life at local, regional, national and EU levels in Member States with significant Roma population, to ensure they register as voters, vote or run as candidates. In this sense, member states need to develop strategic frameworks allowing Roma people to participate actively in civil society at all stages of policy-making and ensuring their involvement in national and EU platform processes.<sup>10</sup>

People with disabilities are also underrepresented in terms of exercising their right to vote and be elected. It is estimated that 800.000 EU citizens from 16 Member States were possibly deprived of the right to participate in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament<sup>11</sup> because of barriers to voting, such as limited accessibility to voting centres, and insufficiently accessible information on candidates and debates. However, national governments, together with the Commission, are working to ensure that persons with disabilities can fully exercise their right to vote. France, for instance, explained in the Meeting of the European cooperation network on elections held on 24 January 2022 that measures to ensure full participation of persons with disabilities in elections 'include introducing polling assistants at polling stations and adapting ballot boxes to help people with limited sight or reduced movement, as well as allowing for outdoors voting when voting stations do not allow access to people using wheelchairs, among other measures.'<sup>12</sup>

Throughout history women have been denied their right to political participation. Even if they are now enfranchised in all democratic systems, women continue to be underrepresented in virtually all national legislative bodies. However, the last few years have witnessed a rise of women participation in EU elections, largely due to various measures taken by Member States. Ireland, for example, has allocated public funding for political parties to promote women participation, Spain has introduced quota systems for candidate lists, and Romania has introduced a general obligation for political parties to have gender-balanced lists of candidates.

Young people form another population segment with low electoral participation. As a result, the European Union has launched in 2019 the *European Union's Youth Strategy*.<sup>13</sup> Its aim is to engage, connect and empower young people in Europe in shaping the politics of the society where they live and encourage democratic participation. An important instrument is the EU Youth Dialogue, an EU-wide participatory mechanism whereby opinions, views and needs of

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<sup>9</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/new-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation-full-package\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/new-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation-full-package_en) Accessed on February 20, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> See point 13 of [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0229\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0229_EN.html) Accessed on March 03, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> See 2019 report of the European Economic and Social Committee *Real rights of persons with disabilities to vote in EP elections*. Accessed on March 03, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> See *Minute: Twelfth Meeting of the European Cooperation Network on Elections*, European Commission Directorate General Justice and Consumers, 24 January 2022. [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-02/minutes\\_ecne\\_-\\_january\\_2022.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-02/minutes_ecne_-_january_2022.pdf) Accessed on 28 March 2023.

<sup>13</sup> See Resolution 2018/C 456/01.

young people and youth organizations are taken into account when defining EU youth policies. Last year, for instance, the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in collaboration with the National Youth Council and with the support of the European Commission, organized the European Youth Conference which connected more than 300 young people with decision makers from all over Europe to discuss the commitment of young people for a sustainable and inclusive Europe.<sup>14</sup> The EU Youth Dialogue is also a participatory tool organised around theme cycles set by the Council of Youth Ministers, a body that contributes to bringing young people's ideas into European policy discussions. This special focus on young citizens parallels policy recommendations made by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2006) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015).

In promoting strong democratic participation, two elements have been identified as necessary conditions: (1) supporting a vibrant civil society, and (2) promoting and enhancing democratic participation. Both conditions, but especially the second one, overlap with new steps in participatory and deliberative democracy taken by several Member States via mechanisms of democratic innovation in order to get people involved in decision-making, to empower them in matters of public concern and to increase democratic legitimacy and trust. It is remarkable that the Action Plan clearly establishes a link between electoral and non-electoral participation and emphasizes the importance of both kinds of participation for the general quality and legitimacy of the democratic system.

Considering that this plan was enacted less than three years ago, it is too early for a proper empirical evaluation of its impact on European and national democracies. In 2023, the Commission committed to review the implementation of the action plan, the conclusions of which remain to be published. This chapter puts forward only a general assessment, restricted to the voter-centred perspective pursued by this project and the conceptual framework for the conditions of voting developed in section 3.

The European Democracy Action Plan provides a valuable framework to strengthen democracy and electoral participation. It is also noteworthy that in September 2020 the European Commission conducted a process of public consultation in which citizens, civil society and stakeholders could have their say about the priorities that should characterize the Action Plan. Among the strengths of the plan is the fact that it adopts a risk-mitigating approach. It correctly identifies some of the most important risks that current European democratic systems face, such as the increasing risk of manipulation or unfairness in voting procedures, the growing weakening of media freedom and its impact on the quality of public debate, the problem of disinformation and fake news, and the existence of particularly vulnerable groups of people whose political and electoral rights are not fully and properly guaranteed. These are critical issues to address in any attempt to enhance electoral participation and ultimately strengthen democracy. As mentioned before, another key strength of the Plan is the link between electoral and non-electoral participation and the identification of the importance of both dimensions of citizen participation for democratic legitimacy.

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14 See *Report On The European Youth Conference* (2022), Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations at the French Ministry of Education and Youth in association with the French National Youth Council, CNAJEP.

However, it is important to notice some shortcomings and limitations that the action plan had from the beginning. First, and most relevant for this chapter, neither the *European Democracy Action Plan* nor other instruments, initiatives or documents issued by the EU, define what is meant by strengthening democracy or enhancing electoral participation from an over-arching perspective like the one developed here. Regarding electoral participation, the emphasis is either put on overriding the obstacles that might make voting more difficult for European citizens or on increasing electoral turn-out. That is, it adopts a mainly quantitative approach to enhancing electoral participation. Some of the risks identified, such as media manipulation or disinformation, are also connected to a more qualitative dimension. Other key factors such as the cognitive conditions and the values and attitudes that should be promoted among citizens, the importance of adequate education and formation of citizens, or the more general idea of how voting quality of should be understood, are largely missing. All these factors are central to the voter-centred approach adopted in this research project.

As stated in section 3, strengthening electoral participation requires paying attention to qualitative factors as well as to quantitative ones, and among the former it is critical to pay attention not only to the effective inclusion of all citizens and to background conditions, such as the need for a healthy media system and a robust public deliberation, but also to more individual cognitive and attitudinal conditions that voters should develop, and that institutional policies should help promote. The *European Action Plan*, as illustrated by the initiatives undertaken so far at national and local levels, lack of this integrating framework, and remains vague and incomplete.

This is not intended to be a general objection to the plan, but rather an identification of some of its shortcomings and weaknesses to be addressed in its review. In support of this, we hope that some considerations presented further on in the chapter, and which are part of our findings, may be relevant.

In this context, we agree that democracy must be protected and reinforced if we are to live in a free society, and one way to do this is by enhancing electoral participation. As already mentioned, one possibility consists in increasing turnout. However, increasing turnout is not a necessary and sufficient condition to make people's participation meaningful. The question we seek to answer in this chapter is whether and when do non-electoral participatory processes have a positive impact on strengthening the quantity and quality of electoral participation. This question can be addressed through various approaches, such as: (1) by studying electoral integrity; (2) by trying to raise democratic turnout; or (3) by enhancing the civic education of younger generations. However, these areas do not fall within the ethical voter-centred perspective that this work is proposing (See Section 2). In this chapter we will argue that increased turnout can be achieved through an enhanced voting quality via the impact that non-electoral participation has on participation in electoral processes. An example is the impact that mechanisms of citizen participation such as the '*Conference on the Future of Europe*' are likely to have on electoral participation. In what follows, we will describe and explain the ways in which electoral participation can be enhanced. Then, we will focus on how non-electoral participation could strengthen electoral participation.

## 5. NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICIES AND NON-ELECTORAL CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

There is no strategy or plan comparable to the *European Democracy Action Plan* at the national and local levels in Europe. All states have their own policies on electoral integrity or for political inclusion of underrepresented social groups, as has been already mentioned in the previous section. Some states have adopted additional initiatives to try to protect some of the background conditions for voting quality of voting, to guarantee civil rights and to protect the media system. All such policies, however, are fragmentary and lack a general framework for strengthening electoral participation. National and local initiatives to strengthen democracy have created new opportunities for non-electoral participation, some of them facilitated by recent developments in democratic theory. Unfortunately, these initiatives do not concern themselves with the key issue of whether and how non-electoral participation may connect or have an impact on electoral participation. In this section we turn to these democratic innovations to examine whether they might contribute to strengthening electoral participation.

In the last few decades, we have witnessed two intertwined central developments in democratic theory. One is the rise of the idea of participatory democracy, first promoted by citizens and social movements in the protests of the 1960s and 1970s, then incorporated in democratic theory by some prominent authors (Pateman, 2000; Habermas, 2015; Mansbridge, 1983; Barber, 2009), and finally implemented experimentally in all democratic systems since the 1990s. What started as a peripheral claim to strengthen democracy through a widening of opportunities for citizens to engage in public decision-making, ended up being the mainstream of democratic innovation and experimentalism, as we will explain below in more detail.

The other crucial development in democratic theory has been the so-called 'deliberative turn' (Bohman, 1998). Even if the idea of deliberative democracy is not new, and can be traced back to Ancient Greece, deliberative democratic theory developed in the 1980s and 1990s and became almost hegemonic in democratic thought (Habermas, 2015; Elster, 1998; Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Besson and Martí, 2016; Bachtiger et al., 2007; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012). The deliberative turn, in which participatory democracy plays an important role, places emphasis on people talking to each other rather than just on the cumulation of their votes (Dryzek, 2008). In representative democracy, people elect their rulers; votes are counted, winners are declared; those elected rule for a given time period and at the end of that period they face again the voters. All that is required of citizens is to cast a ballot from time to time: in most cases, if and only if they feel like it. They are not asked to sit down with others to discuss the issues that affect them. They are not asked to justify their voting decisions to others. Even fewer people are asked to take a public stand and actively participate in campaigning to persuade others that they should vote the same way (Dryzek, 2008).

These two developments in democratic theory have been put into practice at national and local levels through democratic participatory innovations,<sup>15</sup> ranging from direct democracy

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<sup>15</sup> Participatory democratic innovations are those 'that [...] represent a departure from the traditional institutional architecture that we normally attribute to advanced industrial democracies. They take us

processes, such as referendums, to mechanisms such as mini-publics, participatory budgeting, citizen juries, consensus conferences, planning cells, deliberative polls, etc. (Smith, 2015). Democratic innovations show what deliberative democracy can look like on a small scale when people exercise the deliberative turn, i.e., when they come together to discuss common problems, see things from each other's perspective, understand each other's interests and arguments as well as their own, and agree on solutions. Accordingly, it is possible to link the practices of democracy on a small scale with decision-making in larger societies under a more systemic approach (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012). In order to better understand this, we will analyse how democratic participatory innovations foster citizen participation and influence the institutional apparatus of representative democracy in one particular aspect: the quality of voting.

Over the past years, the literature on participatory democratic innovations has begun to provide a framework for evaluating participatory innovations in consolidated democracies (Geißel, 2012, 2013; Smith 2009; el-Wakil and McKay 2020; el-Wakil 2020; el-Wakil and Strebel 2021; Stone 2021). Along with the literature's focus on democratic innovation, the use of participatory democratic innovation has increased in Europe over the past decade. These participatory innovations are expected to have a positive impact on the ills of democracy. Especially in elections, participatory innovations are expected to mitigate low trust in politicians and the increasing reluctance of citizens to vote. Indeed, more and more citizens, practitioners and governments are pinning their hopes on participatory innovation as a means of curing the democratic ills from which representative democracy has suffered.<sup>16</sup> Using this framework, we argue that participatory democratic innovations can positively influence the quality of electoral participation.

The participatory emphasis of democratic innovations has led to the implementation of different types/methods of participatory processes aiming to involve citizens in policy formation and decision-making (Geißel, 2013). In the last 10 years, more than 100 participatory democratic processes have been conducted in Europe (see Tables 1 and 2). Their outcomes feed into political processes, influence public debates, test proposals in the marketplace, legitimize public policy, build trust and constituencies for policy, promote popular control and resist co-optation. Among the wide range of possibilities, we will focus on one in particular: influencing public debates with the objective of improving the quality of electoral participation.

Traditionally, participatory innovations have been approached as case-studies mostly lacking a more general perspective, with some exceptions, like Smith (2009), Geißel (2009),

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beyond familiar institutionalised forms of citizen participation such as competitive elections and consultation mechanisms such as community meetings, opinion polling and focus groups.' (Smith 2009: 1). Another definition is the one pointed out by Geißel: 'we refer to participatory innovation as new procedures consciously and purposefully introduced with the aim of mending current democratic malaises and improving the quality of democracy' (2013: 10). These democratic innovations include popular assemblies, participatory budgeting, mini-publics. Direct legislation processes such as referendums and popular initiatives are also examples of participatory democratic innovations. Their underlying mechanisms directly engage citizens in political decision-making, by providing direct influence on political decisions, and they have institutionalised participation at local, state, transnational, and global levels.

<sup>16</sup> See (Warren, 1992), (Cain et al. 2003), (Dalton 2013), (Dalton et al., 2001, 2004), (Dalton and Welzel 2014), (Pateman, 2012, Pharr), (Putnam and Dalton 2000), among others

and Geißel and Joas (2013). The approach developed by these scholars constitutes a systemic, criteria-based approach. It offers a more comprehensive insight for the evaluation of democratic participation processes. In this chapter we adopt the systemic criteria-based approach to analyse democratic participatory innovation in Europe. In addition, we also include several brief case studies solely to illustrate outstanding democratic innovations together with their background and objectives.

## 5.1 Forms of Non-electoral Participation and Democratic Innovations

Different kinds of democratic innovations result in different kinds of non-electoral participation.<sup>17</sup> The aim of these procedures and mechanisms is to directly engage citizens in political decision-making, by seeking to directly influence political decisions. Since the impact of these processes of democratic participation on the quality of voting and turnout in elections is not entirely clear, we have tried to understand the kind of contribution that they might make in this respect. For more clarity, we have divided them into two categories: general participation processes and fragmented participation processes.<sup>18</sup> The former call on citizens to participate, either through traditional directly democratic mechanisms such as referendums, consultations, or plebiscites, or through indirect mechanisms that complement traditional representative decision-making processes such as citizen initiatives or recalls. The latter mobilize only a fraction of the citizenry, whether randomly selected or self-selected (or, more usually, a combination of the two), and it includes mini-publics, citizen assemblies, deliberative opinion polls, consensus conferences, citizens' juries, planning cells, etc. This distinction is not always clear, since some participatory processes might be open to everyone, including residents with no political rights, but end up engaging only a very small segment of the population.

Some of the processes of general participation can fit the umbrella-concept of direct democracy (See Coppedge, Gerring and Altman, 2018; Welp and Ruth, 2017). For the purpose of this chapter, direct democracy constitutes 'a set of procedures allowing citizens to take political decisions directly through a vote beyond the regular election of representatives. These procedures are regulated either by the constitution or by law. Some are triggered automatically (i.e., mandatory referendums), some by political actors in power ('top-down' procedures), and some call for the prior collection of citizen signatures ('bottom-up' procedures). The results of the activation of these mechanisms may be binding or merely consultative (Welp and Ruth 2017, p. 1)'.<sup>19</sup> These elements may differ significantly in their characteristics, depending on who is in charge of deciding the issue that is included on a political agenda or up for a vote (Hug and Tsebelis, 2002).

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed map of the different institutional innovations available, see Gastil and Levine, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> This distinction resembles -but it is not equivalent to- the most recent one introduced by some scholars between popular vote decisions and assemblies (el-Wakil and McKay 2020; el-Wakil 2020; el-Wakil and Strebel 2021; Gherghina and Geißel 2017).

<sup>19</sup> According to the Venice Commission Report CDL-AD (2005)034, 'The general practice in Europe is for a national referendum to be provided for in the constitution. Where there is no such provision, referendums have either not been introduced on a permanent basis or are quite exceptional' (p. 6) the constitution of the majority of European states provides for the organization of national referendums. States who have no provisions for this are: Germany (See Geißel 2017: 156), Belgium, Netherlands and Cyprus.



Direct democracy is playing an increasingly central role in efforts to legitimize political change in democratic systems. Indeed, mechanisms of direct democracy now exist in law and in practice in various states and at different levels of government. This chapter concentrates on direct democracy in the form of referendums, more specifically on constitutional or legislative referendums, and on citizens' initiatives, agenda initiatives, and recalls (Beetham, 2008), because referendums give citizens a direct say in matters that would otherwise be decided by their representatives. In recent years, direct democracy mechanisms have become more prevalent at local and state levels, but their use has expanded to the supranational EU level (Mendez et al., 2014). Specifically, the EU holds three types of referendums: (1) referendums on EU issues, (2) citizens' initiatives on EU issues at member state level, and (3) European Citizens' Initiatives (ECI).

Let us focus on referendums as the paradigmatic instance of direct and general participation. Since 1972 59 referendums have been held in Europe on EU matters concerning membership, ratification of treaties or specific policy issues (e.g., the introduction of the Euro), (Del Monte, 2022). As Table 1 shows, in recent years referendums seem to have taken two directions. On the one hand, we find those that aim to involve citizens in important decisions concerning internal policies affecting their daily lives, as was the case in referendums held in Croatia. On the other hand, we find referendums on EU-related issues, which differ from those held between 1972 and 2000, as they now focus on issues of salient national importance, for instance, the referendum carried on by Denmark to join the EU's defence policy.

Table 2 provides information on the experience with direct democracy at state and supranational levels. Interestingly, a very recent empirical study seems to show that organizing and holding more referendums might have a negative impact on voter turnout. Apparently, when citizens are called to vote too frequently, a larger number of them decide not to vote (Kostelka et al., 2023).

The last decade has also witnessed the introduction of innovations of more fragmented participation, mostly deliberative ones, with the aim of engaging citizens in political will formation (See Geißel 2013, p. 8), and providing them with a formal role in established institutional procedures (Smith 2009, pp. 2-11). One of the reasons for their popularity is that these mechanisms have the capacity to address a variety of deficits that affect current democracies. Participatory innovations can be motivated by epistemic concerns with improving the quality of the content of the results, by democratic considerations to improve citizen participation and the representativeness of political decision-making bodies, or by a combination of both (Lafont 2019, p. 101). Participatory innovations should lead to informed decisions that consider the interests, values, and ideas of citizens, because these decisions are reached by people deliberating together on the issues or policies in question. Putting the emphasis on citizen deliberation can lead (not only through increased voting) to judgments that are informed, track relevant facts, and are considered.

Mini-publics are the most popular kind of participatory democratic innovations (Wright and Gastil, 2019; Reuchamps et al., 2023). John Dryzek defines mini-publics as a mechanism designed 'to be groups small enough to be genuinely deliberative and representative enough to be genuinely democratic - although they rarely meet standards of statistical representativeness, and they are never representative in the electoral sense' (Bächtiger,

Dryzek, Mansbridge, et. al. 2018, p. 13; see also Goodin, 2008, p. 11). According to Paulis, Pilet and Panel et. al (2021, p. 522), mini-publics 'are based upon two basic constitutive elements: (1) They must run a deliberative process, meaning that participating citizens reach their conclusions or recommendations after receiving information and engaging in a careful and open discussion about the issue or issues before them; and (2) Its members are selected to constitute, as far as possible, a representative subset of the wider population.'

One well-known form of mini-public is the *Deliberative Opinion Poll* (Fishkin, 1991, 1995, 2011, 2018). This mechanism was designed and launched in 1988 by James S. Fishkin and his Centre for Deliberative Polling. A Deliberative Opinion Poll is set up by drawing a random sample of 250 to 500 citizens. They listen to expert testimony, break into smaller groups of about 15 people each to formulate questions for experts, and then gather in plenary to present these questions to expert panels. Participants are surveyed before and after to measure both information gathering and changes in opinion over the course of the event. Deliberative polls are a large and expensive undertaking and are usually conducted in collaboration with the media, which publishes the results. Ackerman and Fishkin, in their book *Deliberation Day* (2004), suggest expanding this model into a nationwide Deliberative Poll before national elections, with simultaneous events across the country in which all citizens could participate.

Citizen assemblies constitute another variety of mini-publics, one that has become very popular in the last few decades (Curato et al., 2021; Reuchamps et al., 2023; though for concerns about their democratic credentials see Lever, 2023; Lafont, 2021). They consist of a number (usually between 50 and 150) of randomly selected citizens, usually stratified and adjusted to ensure their fair representativity, which meet regularly to deliberate about a topic or a range of topics, generally with the aim of producing some decision or recommendation, which may eventually be submitted to a wider referendum. In contrast to deliberative opinion polls, citizen assemblies are normally geared to reach some kind of agreement which is taken by majority rule. Their nature is essentially deliberative too. They are seen as contributing to wider public deliberation and decision-making guidance. The first modern citizen assemblies were organized in 2004 in British Columbia (2004) and in 2006 in Ontario, Canada (Warren and Pearse 2008). Other very popular citizen assemblies were the ones organized in Ireland in 2016 to debate issues to be submitted to constitutional reform (Farrell and Suiter 2019).

*Citizens' Juries* were created in the US, in 1974 by Ned Crosby and the Jefferson Center with the goal of resolving important questions about policy or planning. Citizens' Juries receive information, hear evidence, cross-examine witnesses, and then deliberate on the issue at hand (see, e.g., Coote and Lenaghan, 1997; Crosby, 1995; Gastil and Levine, 2005, Smith and Wales, 2000; Stewart, Kendall and Coote, 1994). Usually, a Citizens' Jury is commissioned by a public authority to which it makes its recommendations. Citizens' Juries were first used to evaluate Presidential candidates in the 1976 U.S. election. Beyond the Jefferson Center and the US, the Citizens' Jury method has been adapted for use in Australia, Germany, and was particularly widespread in Tony Blair's Britain on issues such as health policy, transport and infrastructure, planning issues and local governance (Smith and Wales, 2000).

Planning cells were designed as a method for deliberation in the form of a "micro-parliament" with the purpose of improving citizens' representation, especially vis-à-vis their government

representatives. Their aim is to improve the efficiency of decision-making in the planning process and to provide citizens with new opportunities for political participation (Garbe, 1986). To this end, a small group of people from different backgrounds work together in a planning cell to develop a set of solutions to a problem assigned by a commissioning body. These solutions are then evaluated and the final recommendations are presented in the form of a citizens' report.

Consensus Conferences were initiated in 1987 by the Danish Board of Technology (Joss, 2002). They are a way to deliberate on policy issues with a highly technical content using a combination of lay people and experts. Under the original Danish model, a small group of 15 lay people holds two weekend preparatory meetings to set the agenda for a four-day public forum. There, experts give testimony and are questioned, after which the lay panel retires to write a report that is presented at a press conference at the end of the fourth day, usually attracting the attention of politicians and the media (Dryzek, 2008). In essence, consensus conferences are meetings to formulate and present the opinion of the average member of society on a given issue. The participatory consensus conference functions similarly to a jury, except that laypersons and experts deliberate on technical problems (Joss and Durand, 1995; Hendriks, 2005; Sclove, 2000).

Finally, one of the most innovative ideas that have been launched and implemented in our democratic systems in the last decade is crowdlaw (Noveck, 2018; Alsina and Martí, 2018). Crowdlaw can be defined as any mechanism that, tapping into the use of digital technologies, favours the engagement of large numbers of citizens in the cycle of law and policy making with the double aim of enhancing legitimacy and the effectiveness and efficacy of the resulting decisions and policies. Based on the idea of collective intelligence and the power of collaboration, crowdlaw presents a totally new approach to public management and to the task of solving public problems (Noveck, 2021), and has the potential to provide citizens with much wider opportunities for citizen engagement. In contrast to most democratic innovations discussed in this section, crowdlaw allows for the engagement of large numbers of citizens, facilitated by technological means, and lets citizens have a more direct involvement with legislatures and the public administration (Noveck, 2015; Neblo et al., 2019). One of the first implemented examples of crowdlaw was the Peer to Patent project led by Beth Noveck which transformed the process of patent reviews in the US Patent and Trademark Office (Noveck, 2009). Another significant example has been the project of Crowdlaw for Congress implemented in the US (Noveck, 2020). The number of crowdlaw experiences has been multiplying in the last few years all over the world. In fact, two of the case studies that will be reported in the next section - Decidim and vTaiwan - are usually seen as typical examples of crowdlaw.

This section has reviewed the variety of forms of non-electoral citizen engagement that have exploded and spread over our democratic systems in the last decades. However, there is no evidence available on the actual impact of all these forms of citizen participation on enhancing electoral participation. Intuitively, we might expect that insofar as citizens have greater opportunities to engage in public decision making, they will be more active politically, better informed, more interested in public issues, and perhaps will also develop more democratic attitudes. But we have no empirical support for that claim. One of the few works that have been undertaken in this direction seems to actually indicate that multiplying the

opportunities for voting, for instance by organizing more referendums and consultations, might have a negative effect on voter turnout, by lowering it (Kotelka et al., 2023).

## **5.2 The Quality of Non-electoral Citizen Participation**

Returning to non-electoral participation and its impact on the quality of voting, it might be the case that some mechanisms of citizen participation operate in such a way that participants learn about the views of others and learn to respect those views and engage in a meaningful exchange of arguments with mutual recognition and reciprocity. By extension, we can ask whether these mechanisms may impact wider public deliberation and other conditions associated with the quality of electoral participation, and, more specifically, enhance the democratic culture of citizens in ways that improve the quality of their voting. The numerous democratic experiments that have taken place in the last two decades and in recent months give reasons for optimism about the link between democratic participation and democratic culture. If this is indeed the case, it will offer more clarity on whether democratic participation leads to a democratic culture, which will ultimately be reflected in an improvement of the conditions of quality of electoral participation described in section 3.

The discussion of democratic culture is illuminating in finding links between the quality of voting and non-electoral citizen participation. In particular, there seems to be a link between good democratic culture and democratic participation. People who participate in some form of democratic process appear to be better informed, more knowledgeable about how to influence democratic decision making, and elect representatives who better reflect their attitudes and values. As a result, it has become quite common, to consider democratic innovations increasing citizens' participation beyond elections as a possible cure for challenges faced by traditional representative institutions – low trust in politicians, declining turnout to elections, or partisan disaffiliation (Dalton et al., 2004; Hay, 2007; Mair, 2013).

As previously indicated, some scholars have taken a more systemic or general approach to the study of democratic innovations and their impact on democratic systems and on citizens themselves, instead of the more common, particularist, case-study approach (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Smith, 2009 and the work of Geißel). They do so through a common framework for impact analysis applicable to different democratic innovations (see for an overview Geißel and Newton, 2012; Geißel and Joas, 2013, also e.g. Smith, 2009; Fung, 2003, 2006; Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016; Goodin and Dryzek, 2006).

As shown in Table A, some authors focus on criteria such as inclusion and equality, on efficiency and effectiveness, or on aspects of legitimacy and accountability. Smith (2009), for example, applied the following criteria: inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgment, publicity, efficiency and transferability. Geißel, on her part, proposed five criteria for democracy innovations (although she calls them participatory innovations): 1) inclusive participation and meaningful participation, 2) legitimacy, 3) deliberation, 4) effectiveness, and 5) enlightened citizens.

Table A shows different generations of frameworks which share common points, the most frequent being (1) inclusive participation, (2) meaningful participation, (3) effectiveness and (4) quality of deliberation. In contrast, fewer frameworks included (5) legitimacy or (6) citizens' enlightenment as necessary criteria.

	Renn et al. 1995	Chess and Purcell 1999	Rowe et al. 2004	Abelson and Gauvin 2006	Dalton et al. 2006	Holtk. et al. 2006	Papadop. and Warin 2007	Fung 2008	Smith 2009	Geißel 2009	Michels 2011	Geißel 2012
<b>Inclusive participation</b>	(x)	(x)	x	x	x		x	x	x	(x)	x	x
<b>Meaningful participation</b>			x	x	(x)		(x)	x	x	(x)	x	x
<b>Legitimacy</b>		(x)		x		x				x	x	x
<b>Quality of deliberation</b>	(x)			x			x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Effectiveness</b>		x	x	x		x	x	x	x		(x)	(x)
<b>Citizens' enlightenment</b>	(x)	(x)		x					(x)	x	x	x
<b>Other criteria (examples)</b>	fairness		many	process rules	transparency		publicity, accountability		trans-ferability			trans-ferability

x = mentioned explicitly, although terms differ  
(x) = mentioned implicitly

**Table A:** Frameworks and Criteria Applied in Evaluation Studies on Participatory Innovations. Source: Geißel, B., and Joas, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Participatory democratic innovations in Europe: Improving the quality of democracy?*. Ed. Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Many of the criteria that have been used to evaluate the quality of non-electoral citizen participation can be also used to assess their instrumental capacity to enhance the quality of electoral participation, basically by connecting them with the three types of conditions identified above: procedural conditions, background conditions and individual conditions, both cognitive and related to attitudes and values. This, in turn, may be a useful guide for institutional policies aiming at strengthening electoral participation under a clear and integrated framework.

For instance, democratic innovations that strengthen the cognitive abilities of citizens, such as mini-publics, could help voters develop their capacity to compare candidate voting records (priority panels); legislative panels could evaluate the performance of legislators; and candidate selection panels could evaluate candidates for executive, judicial, and administrative offices (Gastil, 2000: 139-163). As Gastil explains, these mini-publics could act as ‘a transmission belt from deliberation to voting, from the expression of the public’s deliberative voice to its ability to reject unrepresentative public officials’ (Gastil, 2000: 162).

Other forms of non-electoral participation may have positive effects in strengthening democratic attitudes and values of voters. This may be the case, for instance, for citizen assemblies or deliberative polls, since they bring together a group of citizens in an environment designed to promote discussion, increase knowledge, motivate participants, and help them form opinions on public issues in a more rational way (Fishkin, 1995).

In a study conducted to empirically evaluate the effects of the 2007 deliberative poll set up in Turin to discuss immigrant voting rights in local elections and the construction of a railroad line, Fiket and Memoli (2013) found evidence that this procedure promotes a deliberative democratic approach, consisting in democratic debates and exchanges of rationale aiming to reach consensus for a best argument. This clearly has a positive impact

on inclusive participation and on citizens enlightenment and, depending on institutional design, could also have a positive impact on meaningful participation and effectiveness.

To conclude, many scholars have contributed to advancing the understanding of the quality of non-electoral participation. The frameworks they have developed may prove useful to both better understand the quality of electoral participation and to find out whether forms of non-electoral participation may have a positive impact on the quality of electoral participation. We still lack solid empirical evidence showing that non-electoral forms of participation might have an impact on the quantity or quality of voting. But one way in which empirical research might be conducted would be to relate the main elements of the quality of non-electoral participation to the set of procedural, background and individual conditions that determine the quality of electoral participation.

### **5.3 Four Cases of Participatory Democratic Innovation**

As a way of complementing the general overview of non-electoral citizen engagement, we look in greater detail at four specific cases of citizen participation at local, national and European levels which have been regarded as having a positive impact on strengthening democracy: DECIDIM in Spain, vTaiwan, the Chilean Constitutional Convention, and the Conference on the Future of Europe.

#### **5.3.1 DECIDIM**

The 15 million Spanish Indignados Movement of 2011 led, among other things, to a deliberative wave across all of Spain. Some of its members ended up forming political parties, some of which were successful in the Spanish local elections of 2015. The deliberative wave that had been catching momentum found its way into Spanish institutions (Haberer, 2022). In 2015, to support deliberative processes, the Madrid city council launched CONSUL, a citizen participation digital platform, which was adopted by the city council of Barcelona a year later and became the seed of DECIDIM.

DECIDIM ('we decide') is both a free software platform and the name the city council of Barcelona uses to name its citizen participation programmes. As a platform, it is becoming a *de facto* standard and has been adopted by hundreds of public administrations, civil society organisations and private firms, among others the Catalan Government, the European Commission, the French National Assembly and Senate, and the cities of New York and Helsinki.

As a participation programme, DECIDIM was first implemented to collectively draft the Barcelona Strategic Plan (PAM) 2016-2019 and has since been used in more than one hundred participatory processes, from strategic plans at the city or the borough level, to sectoral planning like urban planning, draft ordinances or to gather opinions on a variety of topics. It has supported different types of citizen participation, including deliberative processes, citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting or crowdlaw initiatives.

The programme has had a deep impact: It has enhanced the meaning of concepts such as participation, deliberation, being a citizen, governance and decision-making. It has shifted norms on how citizens' issues are diagnosed, how consensus are reached, and how laws are designed, implemented and enforced. It has led to shifts in power by redefining legitimacy,

representation, the organisation of civil society, minorities, and the right to have a voice (Peña-López, 2019).

Through DECIDIM, deliberation has become a cornerstone of democracy at the level of the Barcelona city council and in the relationship between institutions and citizens. A key precondition for deliberation is full openness of public information. Thus, transparency and open data are key elements of the entire participatory programme, even if they are not formally part of DECIDIM.

Of course, DECIDIM has changed neither mainstream politics nor mainstream policy-making. But it has become an irreplaceable part of the city council, and, more so, part of civil society organisations and of individual citizens. It has structured the public debate, made it more transparent, improved its traceability. It has also contributed to better identifying the main political actors, helped them to coalesce and to build critical mass, and to assess the actual magnitude of issues.

The challenge, for the nearer future, is to tell to what extent DECIDIM has not only improved participation but has also succeeded in reaching out to actors that usually are not part of the public agora. That is, whether the impact is not only qualitative but also quantitative.

### ***5.3.2 vTaiwan E-Rulemaking Public Consultation Meeting***

In 2015, the ‘vTaiwan e-Rulemaking public consultation meeting’ was organised in Taiwan to involve citizens in government decision-making through crowdsourcing. vTaiwan was conceived as an open consultation process, with online and in-person discussions, bringing together experts, government officials, stakeholders, and citizens to reach consensus and issue recommendations for national legislation. In this particular case, the public consultation was successfully used to facilitate negotiations between the Taiwanese authorities, citizens and Uber in order to decide on the latter’s regulation in Taipei. More than 4000 participants were crowdsourced to set the agenda of the government meeting, on which anyone could submit propose proposals. The results of the poll were then discussed via live video broadcasts.

Similar to the use of DECIDIM to support a participatory program that involves crowdlaw initiatives, vTaiwan was managed via the Pol.is platform. Pol.is is an artificial intelligence-based system enabled by advanced statistics and machine learning that facilitates real-time conversations by collecting, analysing, and understanding the opinions of large groups of people expressed in their own words. The use of crowdsourcing combined with machine learning enabled various stakeholders – citizens, stakeholders, Uber representatives, taxi drivers, experts, and government officials – to crowdsource ideas and identify areas of consensus. The deliberative process was conducted using online and offline methods. Various supporting technologies ensured that the process was transparent and open to public participation and review. The process included statements that others could agree or disagree with, government ministers speaking on television about the consensus points, government co-hosts holding mixed stakeholder meetings, and a government commitment to ratify the consensus points.

Two aspects of the vTaiwan case need to be emphasised. The first one concerns the lack of initial consensus among actors. In fact, initially groups were fiercely divided regarding how to deal with the Uber issue. However, the recommendations that emerged at the end of the

process reflected a high consensus and were used as a starting base for talks with Uber, taxi drivers, and the government. Importantly, these discussions were broadcast live and transcribed. At the end, the process resulted in Uber and other groups making important concessions in response to the suggestions made, and the government adopted new regulations in line with vTaiwan's recommendations. The second aspect concerns the overall process. Despite the exceptional character of vTaiwan, several additional editions were organized. It was a successful example of how participatory innovations can lead to the passage of laws by Taiwan's national legislature, and increase trust in officials and in the legitimacy of political decision-making.

### **5.3.3 The 2021-2022 Chilean Constitutional Convention**

On October 6, 2019, thousands of school and university students in Santiago, Chile, initiated a massive, coordinated campaign of fare evasion in the subway system. The movement, which responded to a fare raise, led to several instances of confrontation between protesters and the police. When, on October 18, the Minister of Interior and Public Security initiated criminal proceedings against some students, the conflict rapidly escalated: There were widespread protests, looting, and confrontations throughout the country. The focus of the protests quickly shifted from a discussion over subway fares to a widescale questioning of various aspects of Chilean social, economic, and political life. On October 19, President Sebastián Piñera decreed a state of emergency and subsequently ordered curfews in several cities in the country. The protesters responded with massive demonstrations, many of which led to new confrontations with the police.

The social outburst that shook Chile in 2019 had historical proportions. On several occasions, hundreds of thousands (and even millions) of Chileans took to the streets to demand "dignity" from their political institutions. According to a UN report, 26 people died and over 12,000 were injured in the confrontations.<sup>20</sup> Appeasement only came in November 2019, when Chile's National Congress signed an agreement to hold a national referendum on constitutional reform. Chile's constitution at that time dated from 1980 and was written by the government of dictator Augusto Pinochet. Several previous reform attempts had failed, due to restrictive procedures set out in the constitution itself.

On October 25, 2020, a national referendum was held, asking the citizenry whether they wanted a new constitution and which institution should draft it. Despite fears over the then-raging COVID-19 pandemic (which forced a temporary, 6-month postponement of the plebiscite), the referendum had the largest turnout in Chilean history so far. Over 7.5 million Chileans went to the polls to request a new constitution (78% to 22%), and for it to be drafted by a newly elected Constitutional Convention (79% to 21%). The turnout for the 2020 constitution referendum was over four times larger than the 1.8 million votes cast in the 2017 presidential election. In 2021, the Constitutional Convention was elected with a turnout of over 6 million. That same year, 8.4 million Chileans voted in the second round of

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<sup>20</sup> United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report of the Mission to Chile: 30 October-22 November 2019, available at

<https://www.ohchr.org/es/2019/12/un-human-rights-office-report-chile-crisis-describes-multiple-police-violations-and-calls>.



the presidential election in which Gabriel Boric – a 36-year-old activist and former student leader, highly engaged in the 2019 protests – was elected President.

There is widespread agreement among commentators that the protests contributed to the reinvigoration of electoral procedures in Chile.<sup>21</sup> Claudia Heiss explains that the participation of a 51% of the electorate in the constitutional referendum was “a significant showing given the low turnout that ha[d] become a feature of political life in Chile”.<sup>22</sup> More significant yet was the nature of the electoral participation, which can be directly traced to the protests: while “[t]urnout was lower than usual in wealthy districts, perhaps because the ‘no’ option on the constitution-making process had come to be seen as a lost cause”, “young voters and those with lower incomes – segments of the electorate often missing at the polls – upped their participation significantly”.<sup>23</sup>

The Constitutional Convention began its work on July 4, 2021, and delivered a final proposal for a new constitutional text in 2022. The text was submitted citizens’ approval in a new referendum, which took place in September 2022. The Convention was presided by Elisa Loncón Antileo, a representative of the Mapuche (an indigenous people). To support the Convention, several venues for public participation were established: There were 327 “cabildos” (town halls),<sup>24</sup> 77 popular law-making initiatives (with nearly one million participants),<sup>25</sup> and 248 initiatives from indigenous peoples.<sup>26</sup> However, in September 2022, the new constitutional text was rejected in a referendum by 62% majority.

### **5.3.4 The Conference on The Future of Europe**

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) was a citizen-led series of debates and discussions organised between April 2021 and May 2022, which allowed people from across Europe to share and debate ideas towards shaping a common future. Its objective was to give citizens of the 27 Member States the opportunity to express what they expect from the European Union. It represents one of the most recent examples of how debates and collaborations between citizens and politicians can develop successful models for deliberative democracy through experiments with deliberative assemblies.

The CoFoE has provided useful insights into experiments in participatory democracy. As with many democratic experiments, CoFoE had its own structure and represented an

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<sup>21</sup> See, e.g. Heiss (2021, 42), “Latin America Erupts: Re-Founding Chile”.

<sup>22</sup> Heiss (2021, 42).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> “Cabildos” are “self-convened or municipal organization meetings that will allow a group of people to meet to deliberate on constituent issues, allowing their subsequent systematization in order to promote inputs for the deliberation of the thematic commissions.” See Plataforma Digital de Participación Popular, “Cabildos y Encuentros”, available at <https://plataforma.chileconvencion.cl/m/cabildos/>.

<sup>25</sup> See Plataforma Digital de Participación Popular, “Iniciativa Popular de Norma”, available at [https://plataforma.chileconvencion.cl/m/iniciativa\\_popular/](https://plataforma.chileconvencion.cl/m/iniciativa_popular/).

<sup>26</sup> “The purpose of the indigenous participation and consultation process will be that, within the framework of the operation of the Constitutional Convention and the proposed Constitution that it elaborates, the State of Chile recognizes, specifies, respects, promotes, protects, and guarantees all its obligations towards the different pre-existing indigenous peoples and nations, which emanate from the international obligations contracted”. See Plataforma Digital de Participación Popular, “Iniciativas de Pueblos Originarios”, available at [https://plataforma.chileconvencion.cl/m/iniciativa\\_indigena/](https://plataforma.chileconvencion.cl/m/iniciativa_indigena/).

extraordinary experiment in terms of size and ambition. It encompassed a multilingual digital platform for idea sharing, decentralized events – online, in person and hybrid events with national, regional and local European authorities, as well as four Panels, each made up of 200 European citizens chosen through random selection, in addition to national panels and a Conference Plenary.

Each of the four European Panels<sup>27</sup> of the CoFoE included young people and convened in three sessions. The panels allowed citizens to have direct exchanges with politicians by following ‘a rigorous methodology and a clear deliberative protocol, built on the already rich experience of citizens’ assemblies, with input from experts, facilitators and fact-checkers, will be implemented to allow a true bottom-up and citizen-driven deliberation.’<sup>28</sup> The panels were divided into three phases of work that coincided with each of the sessions. In the first phase – agenda setting – citizens prioritized the issues they wanted to address and to delve into as a group. In the second phase, citizens addressed the previously identified issues in a ‘thematic deepening’ process. The third and final adopted recommendations. To accomplish this work, panels’ sessions consisted of plenary parts, where general presentations were made and discussions were held with input from all participants, and breakout sessions or working groups, where work was concentrated on subtopics.

The most innovative element was the Conference Plenary, where, after final recommendations were made, a final feedback event allowed citizen to track responses to their recommendations and possible practical implementations. The recommendations of the citizen panels were debated without a predetermined outcome. Two specific aspects were innovative. The first concerns the end of the deliberative process, the final recommendations of the panels. Its function was to transform the citizens’ agenda into a political process. It worked like a ‘chain of connection’ between the panels and the plenary, but also took into account the contributions collected on the multilingual digital platform used for interactions during the Panel sessions. The second innovative aspect concerns the hybrid format of the plenary, together with its time-limited focus and its multi-level process structure.<sup>29</sup> Composed of more than 400 people and taking place in the hemicycle of the European Parliament, its purpose was to debate and discuss the substance of the topics of the National and European Panels. Working on a consensus basis, the plenary presented its proposals to the executive board of the Conference, which then drafted and published its conclusions.

An analysis of the qualitative data from the SenseMaker survey<sup>30</sup> conducted by Citizens Take Over Europe to measure public attitudes toward the Conference on the Future of Europe carried out by the European University Institute (EUI) showed ‘that most respondents want to be involved through participatory instruments, such as working groups,

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<sup>27</sup> Panel 1 - "Stronger economy, social justice, jobs, education, culture, sport, digital transformation"; Panel 2 - "EU democracy, values, rights, rule of law, security"; Panel 3 - "Climate change, environment, health"; Panel 4 - "EU in the world, migration."

<sup>28</sup> See Conference on the Future of Europe, The European Citizens’ Panels - questions and answers, available at <https://futureu.europa.eu/en/assemblies/citizens-panels?locale=en>

<sup>29</sup> See <https://missionspubliques.org/towards-the-plenary-of-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/?lang=en> Accessed on December 7, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> See Davis 2022.

citizens' panels or thematic surveys which should be disseminated throughout CoFoE. They envision a collaborative process of drafting policy recommendations with other EU citizens, ensuring their voices are heard and improving existing proposals. Respondents perceive themselves as capable of working on solutions for complex problems and thereby offering valuable input to improve the quality of policy-making.'

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

In the current context of the crisis of democracy, strengthening electoral participation is a critical objective which can be described via quantitative factors, such as voter turnout, qualitative ones, or both. While elections remain central for the legitimacy of our democratic systems, a plurality of forms of non-electoral participation and democratic innovations have proliferated and have been implemented throughout our democratic systems. These innovations and non-electoral participatory processes may have a significant role to play in enhancing the democratic legitimacy of our systems by reinforcing democratic inclusion and by improving the epistemic capacity of public decision-making processes. However, it is an open question whether the use of such non-electoral forms of citizen participation may have a positive or negative impact on electoral participation. More research is urgently needed on this issue.

In this chapter we have provided, first, a general framework of analysis to better understand the idea of strengthening electoral participation, both in its quantitative and qualitative dimensions. We have introduced several relevant distinctions that have allowed us to understand the various types of conditions that should be fulfilled in order to strengthen electoral processes and voting. We have distinguished between procedural conditions - such as the principle of inclusion and electoral integrity, background conditions - such as respect for basic civil democratic freedoms, the existence of a robust public deliberation and of a healthy media system, and individual conditions, which include political knowledge and cognitive capacities, as well as the ability to develop the right kind of democratic values and attitudes. This framework, even if it still needs further and more detailed development, can be useful in guiding institutional policy efforts to strengthen democracy in general, and electoral participation in particular, as well as to assess those policies that have already been adopted at European, national and local levels.

Second, we have studied some European initiatives that have been recently launched with the aim of strengthening EU and national democratic elections. We have argued that, even if such initiatives correctly identify some of the most important risks threatening our electoral processes, they do not provide a precise and complete framework of analysis and leave several gaps unfilled.

We have also explored the most important strategies pursued at national and local levels to strengthen democracy by promoting different forms of non-electoral participation, with a special emphasis on some recent democratic innovations. We conducted four case-studies of different instruments/processes of non-electoral participation: the DECIDIM online platform developed by the city of Barcelona, the vTaiwan digital space for citizen engagement in Taiwan, the recent Chilean constitutional convention, and the Conference for the Future of Europe. Even if some take for granted that promoting forms of non-electoral participation is the key strategy to strengthen not only democratic legitimacy in general, but the quantity

and quality of electoral participation in particular, we argue that this is not yet a foregone conclusion.

In general, we lack conclusive evidence of which policies may be effective in strengthening electoral participation. More concretely, we do not know whether non-electoral participation might have a positive impact on electoral participation. Some initial empirical research might actually suggest that at least some mechanisms of direct democracy, such as referendums and consultations, might have a negative impact on voter turnout. But no empirical study has shown how non-electoral participation might improve the quality of voting in elections.

Finally, we have explored some of the frameworks most commonly used to evaluate the quality of non-electoral participation, and we have briefly examined how some of the criteria used to evaluate this type of participation might be connected to some of the constitutive conditions of the quality of voting. The four concrete case studies we have selected exemplify the kind of European, national and local strategies that aim to promote non-electoral participation as a way of enhancing democratic legitimacy and the quality of electoral participation.

The ultimate conclusion should not be a surprise. Much more research is urgently needed, both theoretical one but also and especially empirical. The research conducted in this chapter aimed to improve the understanding of what strengthening electoral participation means and how it can be achieved, by assessing the main policies enacted at the European, national and local levels targeting this objective, and by exploring whether and how promoting non-electoral participation might be an adequate strategy to strengthen electoral participation.

**Table 1:** Referendums in Europe 2012-2022

Country	No. of direct democracy processes	Voter trigger	Vote trigger actor	Total electorate	Turnout	Result status
Austria	2	Top down	Parliament	6.378.628	-	-
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bulgaria	5	Automatic (1); Top down (1); Bottom up (3)	Constitution (1); Parliament (1); Citizens (3)	6.952.183	51% (max)	Binding
Cyprus	1	Top down	-	175.258	-	Binding
Croatia	2	Automatic (1); Bottom up (1)	Constitution (1); Citizens (1)	4.504.765	-	Binding (1)
Denmark	4	Automatic (3); Top down (1)	Constitution (3); Parliament (1)	4.153.041	72% (max)	-
Slovakia	3	Bottom up (3)	Citizens (3)	4.411.529	21%	Binding (3)
Slovenia	6	Bottom up (6)	Citizens (6)			
Spain	-	-	-	-	-	-
Estonia	-	-	-	-	-	-
Finland	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	-	-	-	-	-	-
Greece	1	Top down	Government	9.858.508	62%	Binding
Germany						
Hungary	1	Top down	President	8.272.625	44%	Binding
Ireland	7	Automatic (7)	Constitution (7)	3.397.636	64% (max)	Binding
Italy	3	Top down (2); Bottom up (1)	Various territorial units (1); Citizens	50.995.985	65% (max)	Binding
Latvia	1	Bottom up	Citizens	1.545.004	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	3	Top down (3)	Parliament (3)	246.974	86%	Non-binding
Malta	1	Bottom up	Citizens	338.450	75%	Binding
Netherlands	2	Bottom up (2)	Citizens (2)	13.064.932	52% (max)	Non-binding
Poland	1	Top down	President	30.565.826	8%	Non-binding
Portugal	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czech Republic	-	-	-	-	-	-
Romania	4	Automatic (1), Bottom up (1); Top down (2)	Constitution (1), Citizens (1), President (2)	18.277.511	43% (max)	Non-binding (2), binding (1)
Sweden	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sources: Participedia; C2D | Centre for Research on Direct Democracy; and Del Monte, M. (2022). Referendums on EU issues: *Fostering civic engagement: In-depth analysis*. European Parliament.

**Table 2:** Deliberative processes in Europe 2012-2022

**1. Global and Supranational Level**

Title	Level	General topic	Year	Method	Number of participants	Organiser
Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing	Global	Science and technology Health	2021	Citizens' assembly Citizens' jury	-	Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance
The World Wide Views on Climate and Energy	Global	Environment: climate change Regional and global governance	2015	Deliberative polling Deliberation Citizens' summit World Wide Views	10.000	The World Wide Views Alliance
World Wide Views' Global Consultation on Biodiversity	Global	Environment: species protection; environmental conservation Regional and global governance	2012	Consult: Facilitate dialogue, discussion, and/or deliberation	3000	The World Wide Views Alliance
Conference on the Future of Europe	Europe	Governance and political Institutions Environment Economics	2021	Multiple deliberation mechanism. Consult: Propose and/or develop policies, ideas and recommendations;  Facilitate dialogue, discussion and/or deliberation;  Recruit/select participants	More than 800 citizens have participated in citizen panels	European Union: European Parliament (EP); the European Council and the European Commission

## 2. National Level

Title	State	General topic	Year	Method	No. of partic.	Organiser
Mini-Public on the Future of Agriculture in Austria	Austria	Environment Agriculture	2012	Deliberative and dialogic process Deliberation Civic Lottery Sortition	12	National government
My DNA: all concerned	Belgium	Science and technology	2018	Citizens' Jury	32	l'Institut de recherche fédéral Sciensano et la Fondation Roi Baudouin
"Notre Futur": Deliberative Process on Aging in Belgium	Belgium	Ageing issues	2013	Consult: Facilitate dialogue, discussion, and/or deliberation. Focus group.	24	The World Wide Views Alliance
OpenGov.gr - The Greek Open Government Initiative	Greece	Governance and political institutions Transparency	2012 (end date)	Deliberative and dialogic process Evaluation, oversight, and social auditing Online deliberation	-	National government
Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the United Kingdom	UK	Democracy	2022	Citizens' assembly Online deliberation	75	Involve (charity)
Citizens' Assembly on Brexit	UK	Governance and political institutions International affairs Immigration and migration	2017	Deliberative and dialogic process Opinion survey, voting	50	The Constitution Unit (University College London)
Climate Assembly UK	UK	Climate change Alternative and renewable energy Carbon capture and sequestration	2020	Deliberative and dialogic process Citizens' assembly Sortition Deliberation Q&A session	108	National government

UK Citizens' Assembly on Funding for Adult Social Care	UK	Aging issues Quality of health care Long-term care	2018	Deliberative and dialogic process Sortition Citizens' assembly Deliberation Q&A session	47	NGO
Public Dialogue on Emerging Policy Involving Science and Technology General Issues	UK	Science and technology	2014 (end date)	Deliberative and dialogic process Workshop	43	National government
Openness in Animal Research Dialogue	UK	Animal welfare Biomedical research and development	2014 (end date)	Deliberative and dialogic process Experiential and immersive education	80	NGO
Citizens Juries on Artificial Intelligence	UK	Artificial intelligence	2019	Citizens' Jury	36	NGO
Public Engagement on Shale Gas and Oil Developments	UK	Energy Environment Science and technology	2014 (end date)	Workshop Deliberation	71	National government and for-profit business
Space Weather Dialogue	UK	Science and technology	2015 (end date)	Deliberative and dialogic process Workshop Survey Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Online consultations	1100 approx.	National government
Naturally Speaking... Public Dialogue for the UK National Ecosystem Assessment	UK	Environmental conservation Water quality	2015 (end date)	Workshop	118	UK Natural Environmental Research Council
Leap Seconds Public Dialogue on Time Changes in the UK	UK	Science and technology	2015 (end date)	Workshop Deliberation Survey Pop-up Online deliberation	111	National government



Estonia's People's Assembly 'Rahvakogu' on Government Spending	Estonia	Government transparency Government spending Government corruption	2013	Online consultations	314	National government
Rahvaalgatus.e.e: Online Participation at the National Level in Estonia	Estonia	Public participation Government transparency	2016	Information and communications technologies (ICT) Voter information services Online consultations Online voting Petition Direct democracy	-	National government
Danish Deliberative Poll on Denmark's Full Integration in the European Police Force (National folkehøring om Europæisk politi)	Denmark	Police Regional and global governance	2015	Sortition Deliberation Civic lottery	384	National government
Danish Deliberative Poll on the EU (Folkehøring om EU)	Denmark	EU integration Future of EU	2017	Deliberative poll	105	National government
Danish Deliberative Poll on the EU (Folkehøring 2018 om EU)	Denmark	EU integration The role of Denmark within the EU	2018	Deliberative poll	400	National government
Citizen Workshop on Future Research Areas in Denmark	Denmark	Science and technology Research and development	2017	Deliberation workshop	18	The Danish Board of Technology Foundation
The Irish Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality	Ireland	Gender equality and equity Gender identity	2021 (end date)	Deliberative and dialogic process	100	National government
Irish Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality	Ireland	Gender equality and equity	2020 (on-going)	Deliberation Citizens' assembly Civic lottery Sortition	99	National government

Irish Constitutional Convention (2012-2014)	Ireland	Constitutional reform Human rights LGBTQ issues	2014 (end date)	Deliberation	100	National government
The Irish Citizens' Assembly	Ireland	Constitutional reform Climate change	2016	Citizens' assembly Q&A session Deliberation Expert advisory panel	99	National government
We, the internet: Internet governance, with and for citizens	France No geographic limits	Internet governance Artificial intelligence Citizenship and role of citizens	2020	Deliberative and dialogic process Collaborative approaches	5000	-
French Mini-Public in the Framework of a National Debate on Bioethics	France	Biomedical research and development Aging issues	2018	Deliberation Sortition Civic lottery	22	National government
French Mini-Public on Healthcare and Big Data	France	Health Care Reform	2016	Deliberation Sortition Civic Lottery	17	National government
French Mini-Public on Addictive Behaviour at School	France	Education Health Youth issues Addiction treatment and management	2017	Deliberation Sortition Civic lottery	15	National government
French Mini-Public on End-of-Life Care	France	Health Aging	2013	Deliberation Sortition Civic lottery	18	National government
Citizens' committee on vaccination against COVID-19	France	Health	2021 (on-going)	Citizens' jury	35	National government
French Citizens' Jury on Vaccination	France	Health	2016	Citizens' jury Deliberation Survey	22	National government
Citizens' Consultations on Breast Cancer Screening in France	France	Health	2016	Consensus conference Online consultations	27	National Government
CESE Citizen Group on Social Inequality in France	France	Economic inequality	2019	Deliberation Workshop	27	CESE

Online Participation at the National Level in France	France	Public participation Government transparency	2013	Collaborative approaches Direct democracy Evaluation, oversight, and social auditing	-	National government NGO
Citizens' Assembly on restrictions and recommendations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic	Finland	Health	2021	Citizens' assembly	70	Academic Institution: University of Turku
Germany's Citizens' Assembly on Democracy (Bürgerrat Demokratie)	Germany	Citizenship and role of citizens Political rights Public participation	2019	Citizens' assembly Sortition Deliberation	160	NGO Mehr Demokratie
German Citizen Conference on Climate Policy	Germany	Climate change	2016 (end date)	Deliberation Sortition Civic lottery Citizen conferences	472	National government
Citizens' Councils on the Integrated Environmental Program 2030	Germany	Environmental conservation Climate change Sustainable development	2017	Deliberation The Vorarlberg Bürgerrat model, aka Citizens' Councils Civic lottery Deliberative forum Online deliberation	79	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety
The Constitutional Forum in Romania	Romania	Governance and political institutions	2013	Deliberation Public debate Sortition Civic lottery	-	National government
CONSTITULUX: Citizens' Consultation in Luxembourg	Luxemburg	Constitutional reform	2016	Deliberation Sortition Civic lottery	60	National government and academic institution
Citizens' Assembly of Scotland	Scotland	Governance and political institutions	2020 (end date)	Citizens' assembly Deliberation	100	National government

Sources: Participedia.net; POLITICIZE Dataset: Paulis, E., Pilet, J.-B., Panel, S., Vittori, D., and Close, C. (2021). The POLITICIZE dataset: An inventory of deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) in Europe. *European Political Science*, 20(3), 521–542. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-020-00284-9>

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