



The Direct-Democracy-Navigator

World Fact-Check

The Direct-Democracy-Navigator presents a new research: The World Fact-Check. In this study Dr. Klaus Hofmann, Editor of the Navigator from the University of Wuppertal, follows the general question: Why, in general terms, were referendums – initiated by authorities or by citizens - conducted in electoral democracies worldwide? Guided by the answers given to this questions by David Butler and Austin Ranney as well as Silvano Moeckli the study is divided into two parts. To be able to provide a well founded thesis, at first the results of the empirical fact-checks for the last 20 years are presented according to the way the Navigator classifies direct democratic instruments. In a second step the empirical data is investigated to approach the answer. This paper provides a summary of the findings.

Theses

The likelihood for performing *Plebiscites* increases in particular – in accordance with Moeckli's thesis - if the state is in the search for a new political order due to a crisis, a collapse or a fresh start. Also “upcoming of elementary, irreversible decisions of a nation”, coupled with questions about the identity of a nation can be regarded as a trigger for plebiscites.

A variety of countries that used the *Citizen initiative* instrument during the past 20 years were on their way of transformation from an authoritarian to a democratically structured political system. Accordingly, the instrument was also used to let citizens participate in the search for a new foundation of the state. From Lithuania to Slovakia, which left the former Czechoslovak State Association, particularly opposition parties and grassroots organizations participated in this discussion by using the rights enshrined in their respective constitution.

The research suggests that citizens (at first) do not shun away from using the instruments because of further hurdles like the non-binding effect or approval-/turnout quorums and become active nonetheless. To what extent such quorums in particular weaken representative democracy (“political disillusionment”) in the medium- and long-term as well, remains to be investigated.

The instrument of the *Citizen initiative* will be especially used if questions are discussed

- in the context of transformation into a democratic state structure,
- the national identity and the global incorporation,
- of social modernization and globalization,
- of redemption and of the sense of justice.

However, these theses cannot sufficiently explain the fact that initiatives were not conducted in all 'initiative states', or why referendums on the basis of a citizen initiative were only held very rarely in some states. The special and outstanding example of Switzerland points to another factor: the tradition of the political culture of a country. The latter thesis needs to be further investigated in future comparative research.

Empirical Results

1. *Plebiscites*: The author and initiator of the ballot proposal is a minority of a representative authority or a representative authority.

The instruments of *minority plebiscite* or the *minority veto-plebiscite* exists in 12 states (albeit topic restricted in many cases). It was conducted in only two countries, Italy and Slovenia: 4 and 8 referendum questions. Based on the legal instrument of the *veto-plebiscite* (usually initiated by the President in presidential systems) is seldom used as well. Just 2 states conducted referendums around the world: Iceland and Turkey.

Out of a total of 70 countries which provide the classical *plebiscite*-form of decision-making, more than half of the states did not use this opportunity in the past 20 years. In total 123 referendums were held. Most of them were conducted in Ecuador (25), Columbia (15) and Poland (9). Most interesting this instrument does not exist in Switzerland.

2. *Citizen Initiatives, Citizen Initiated Referendums and the Obligatory Referendum*

At least 25 countries - almost 21% of democracies – provide the instruments of the *Citizen Initiative* (the author and initiator of a ballot proposal is a group of citizens) or combined with an authorities counterproposal at national level. In 18 of these states, national referendums were conducted during the past 20 years.

There were 162 votes during the past 20 years. More than 50% of those were conducted at the national level in Switzerland (86), followed by San Marino with 13 referendums and Slovakia with 10 ballot votes. The compilation of the number of referendums shows a significant distance between Switzerland and the 'second placed' San Marino. The Swiss rules are characterized by the low minimum of gathered signatures for the submission of national initiatives, combined with a long time frame for their collection. It seems nonetheless questionable that this should be the only factor responsible for the very high number of ballots.

Far fewer countries offer the possibility of *Citizen Initiated Referendums* (the author is a representative authority and the initiator a group of citizens) at national level than countries provide citizen initiatives. There is a total of 14 states, less than 10% of all democracies. Three of these countries limit this right to special cases. Two states dominate the number of votes by means of these instruments: about 50% were held in Switzerland, almost 30% in Italy. During the past 20 years, 98 such referendums were conducted.

70 democracies have the instrument of an *Obligatory Referendum*. 165 ballots took place over the last 20 years - but in 26 countries only. Again, the list is spearheaded by Switzerland (37), followed by Palau (25), Micronesia (22) and Ireland (21).

Please check out the webpage of the Direct-Democracy-Navigator for references and more details: <http://www.direct-democracy-navigator.org/articles/the-direct-democracy-navigator-world-fact-check-i>

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Annex: Amount of referendums in Initiative-States – Form of procedures

Country	PCI/PCI +	PCR/PCR +	LOR	ATP	MTP/MVP	AVP	Total
Bolivia	0	0	3	7			10
Bulgaria	1			1			2
Costa Rica	0			1			1
Croatia	1		1				2
Ecuador	0		1	25			26
Macedonia	0						0
Hungary	5			2			7
Kenya	Since 2012		1	1			2
Latvia	3	4	1				8
Liechtenstein	10	0					10
Lithuania	2		5				7
Marshall Islands	0						0
Mexico	Since 2013						0
Micronesia	4		22				26
New Zealand	4			7			11
Norfolk Island	5						5
Palau	6		25				31
Peru	1						1
Phillipines	0	0					0
San Marino	13	6		2			21
Slovakia	11		3	1			15
Switzerland	86	52	37				175
Taiwan	4	0		2			6
Georgia	1			2			3
Uruguay	3	1	1				5

Form of procedure	Code	Type
Citizens' Initiative	PCI	Initiative
Citizens' Initiative + Authorities' Counter-Proposal	PCI+	Initiative
Citizen-initiated Referendum	PCR	Referendum
Citizen-initiated Referendum + Counter-Proposal	PCR+	Referendum
Obligatory Referendum	LOR	Referendum
Plebiscite	ATP	Plebiscite
Veto-Plebiscite	AVP	Plebiscite
Authorites' Minority Plebiscite	MTP	Plebiscite
Authorites' Minority Veto-Plebiscite	MVP	Plebiscite