

5. Measuring Citizens' Process Preferences and Perceptions

Recent research suggests that both process preferences and process perceptions are relevant predictors of citizens' confidence in political institutions. So far, however, no standardized scale that systematically measures process preferences and perceptions has existed (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147). This chapter describes the development and validation of multi-dimensional scales which measures citizens' preferences concerning political decision-making processes and according perceptions. In Section 5.1 the hypotheses that guide the development of the scales are presented. The operationalizations of variables as well as the procedures of data collection are described in the method section in Section 5.2. The results indicate that citizens distinguish different dimensions of political process: consensus-orientation, competition and the efficiency of political decision-making processes (Section 5.3). Section 5.4 provides the reader with a summary and conclusion.

5.1. *Hypotheses*

Survey research to date has focused on the measurement of policy preferences (for instance Krosnick, 1988; Page & Shapiro, 1992). There is no standardized scale to measure process preferences or the perception of political processes, however (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147; Weatherford, 1992, p. 149). Hence, an important aim of this study is the development of standardized scales to measure citizens' process preferences and process perceptions. Both process preferences and process perceptions may refer to different aspects of political processes. For instance, inclusiveness, transparency, equality, and responsiveness are considered to be relevant aspects of political processes (cf. Kaina, 2008). The focus of empirical research, however, is on the fairness of decision-making procedures (e.g. Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 2000; Tyler, Degoey, & Smith, 1996). Procedural justice research investigates the perception of the trustworthiness of political processes, their neutrality, and the equal consideration of different opinions (Tyler, et al., 1996). Drawing on the work of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), efficiency can be considered as another aspect of political processes. Efficiency and fair behavior are also identified as dimensions of political processes in a study by Weatherford (1992). Using data from the National Election Studies, Weatherford showed that the differentiation between these process aspects is not only conceptually relevant, but also that citizens do distinguish between them. In the study by Weatherford (1992), efficiency refers to policy making without an undue waste of time or resources. Fairness refers to regular and predictable decision-making processes as well as an open and equal access to decisional arenas.

Literature on preference formation suggests that “what people want might be socially constructed” (De Mesquita & McDermott, 2004, p. 276). Hence it seems plausible to argue that preferences regarding political process develop within a distinct cultural setting and are therefore shaped by the political culture of a nation. In line with that, research in political science suggests that citizens’ political preferences mainly develop on the basis of their political socialization within a distinct political culture (De Mesquita & McDermott, 2004, p. 276; Fuchs, 1999b; Widlavsky, 1987). Accordingly, citizens in different political cultures were found to hold distinct preferences as regards political decision-making processes. The political culture of consensus democracies, such as Switzerland, can be traced back to the dominant role of negotiations and bargaining processes and the consensus-orientation of political institutions. This fosters the citizens’ expectation that social problems are best solved based on compromises (Linder & Steffen, 2006). Competitive democracies, in contrast, are shaped by the government-opposition code (Kaase & Newton, 1995). Majoritarian-based or hierarchical processes dominate and are characterized by elements of competition and the attribution of political achievements to certain political actors. The related expectations of the citizens are clearly defined programmes and parties that are capable of forming governments on their own (Kaase & Newton, 1995, p. 134). Similarly, Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) argue that U.S. citizens expect a stealth democracy, i.e. quick and decisive action: “[Americans] dislike compromise and bargaining [...] and they dislike debate and publicly hashing things out, referring to such activities as haggling or bickering” (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995, p. 18). Likewise, Walz (1996) argues that citizens in Germany expect political institutions to decide in the interest of the public good and in an effective and competent manner.

Building on the reviewed literature, this study will focus on three different dimensions of political processes. First, the study is interested in preferences concerning the consensus-orientation of political processes as well as according perceptions as an important aspect of political decision-making in consensus democracies. Second, this study refers to preferences and perceptions with regard to political competition as an aspect that was found to be of great value for citizens in competitive democracies (Kaase & Newton, 1995). And third, because research has shown that citizens in the U.S. want quick and decisive action (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), this study focuses on preferences and perceptions regarding the efficiency of political procedures. Consensus-orientation is associated with respectfulness and fairness of political behavior, the role of compromise-seeking endeavors and the fact that there are no losers in political processes. The competition dimension concerns the role of clear orders and the decisiveness of political actors and refers to political debates that are shaped by quarrels or power struggles as a way of competitive majoritarian-based decision-making processes. The efficiency dimension refers to easy structures of political processes, fast and efficient procedures and the avoidance of delays. Although other process aspects may be distinguished, these three aspects appear to be the most central ones in the literature and constitute a first step in the investigation of process preferences and perceptions.

- H1a: The scale to measure process preferences consists of three correlated dimensions: compromise-orientation, competition, and efficiency.
- H1b: The scale to measure process perceptions consists of three correlated dimensions: compromise-orientation, competition, and efficiency.
- H1c: The process preferences scale and the process perceptions scale are independent constructs.

Moreover, I assume that the measurement of process preferences is culturally invariant.⁴⁴ Cultural invariance refers to the aspect that a construct has the same meaning in different cultures. Measurement invariance is a precondition for interpreting differences in scores in different cultures (cf. Bensaou, Coyne, & Venkatraman, 1999; Little, 1997). The metric invariance of the process preference scales was tested with samples from two different cultures: Switzerland as a consensus democracy and Germany as a rather competitive democracy. Cultural invariance of the scale is given if it has the same measurement structure for citizens from Germany as it has for Swiss citizens.

- H2: The process preference scale is culturally invariant.

In addition, the invariance of the process preferences scale as regards the objects of assessment is assumed. This study distinguishes between process preferences concerning the executive political branch (i.e. the Swiss government) and the legislative branch (i.e. the Swiss parliament, which consists of National Council and Council of States). Invariance is given if the scale measures citizens' preferences as regards decision-making processes within the executive branch in the same manner as it measures citizens' preferences as regards decision-making processes within the legislative branch. This study is interested in the measurement invariance as a precondition for being able to meaningfully interpret differences in score.

- H3: The process preference scale shows invariance as regards the objects of assessment.

5.2. Method

Section 5.2.1 describes the variables and operationalization. The data collection procedure is outlined in Section 5.2.2. Section 5.2.3 discusses the methods of data analysis.

⁴⁴ Whereas the measurement of policy preferences has received some scholarly attention, the measurement of process preferences has not (John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, 2001a, p. 147). This study aims to make a methodological contribution to the development of a standardized scale to measure process preferences. Hence, the cultural invariance as well as the invariance regarding different objects of assessment were tested for the process preferences scale.