

Effects of Government-initiated Referendums

A Study of how Swedish Citizens Perceive Democracy after
Experiencing Government-initiated Local Referendums

Abstract

This thesis asks the question “*How do government-initiated local referendums affect citizens’ perceptions of democracy?*”. In the theoretical discussion, direct democratic theory is found to be inadequate when studying the effects of government-initiated referendums. Since the referendums are government-initiated, that negates the important aspect of bypassing elites. The referendum democracy concept as a second theoretical view on referendums offered the perspective of referendums as people’s veto. However, also this concept adhered to the view that citizens are the main actors in a referendum process. Thus, theory which is more finely tuned to the power of elites was developed to study the effects government-initiated referendums may have on citizens. The resulting hypothesis (*Citizens who experience local referendums will grant their local government increased trust and legitimacy*) was tested on the Swedish case of local referendums. Independently pooled survey data for the years 2002-2012 was employed measure over time. Logistic regression revealed that no relationships between experiencing a government-initiated referendum and more favourable perceptions of democracy were statistically significant. It is suggested that this might depend on the very nature of the referendums. By skewing the power in favour of political representatives, citizens no longer feel as participants in shaping policy.

Key words: Referendum, Government-initiated referendum, Perceptions of democracy, Direct democracy, Referendum democracy

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1 Introduction

Referendums are often discussed from two democracy traditions – the direct and the representative. Opponents of an increased use of referendums often refer to that citizens do not (or cannot) make informed decisions, that referendums upsets political balance and ultimately do not serve any purpose in improving citizens' views of government and democracy (cf. Setälä, 1999: 43-45). Advocators of referendums often call upon the positive effects direct democracy predicts them to have on citizens: Through participation in popular votes citizens are thought to be civically educated which makes them more responsible, tolerant and politically enlightened (Pateman, 1970; Kaufmann, 2005). Both traditions rest on normative ideas of how democracy ought to be enacted. However, they are flawed when conducting empirical analyses.

While most historical studies on the referendum institute are normative, a growing empirical literature often relies on direct democratic theory when studying referendums that actually occur in representative democracy models (cf. Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004). The theoretical claims direct democracy makes about civic education are applied to referendums placed in a non-direct context. By not taking this important factor into account properly, the theoretical claims are flawed. When analysing the effects referendums have on how citizens perceive democracy thus have to be situated in the representative model they take place. This means that, with regards to how citizens perceive government and democracy, we cannot rely on the expectations set by direct democracy. Most scholars would probably agree that referendums as they are implemented today do not represent pure direct democracy, but there seems to be an unwillingness to move beyond the direct democratic theoretical framework.

There have been tries to adjust the study of referendums to the representative democracy model. Mendelsohn and Parkins (2001) “referendum democracy” is such an attempt. They argue that referendums can function as a control mechanism with which citizens can threaten and correct representatives who do not act in the citizens' interest. Although this model can be seen as less direct democratic, it is still expected that voters are empowered, and affected in the sense that they gain knowledge about, and feel responsible for political matters they vote upon. However, Mendelsohn and Parkins model only apply to citizen-initiated or mandatory referendums where citizens are the main actors in the process of requiring a popular vote. Thus, “referendum democracy” cannot be used to accurately study government-initiated referendums which are shaped on the premises of elites. It is a step in the right direction, but it still clings to the direct democratic thought that citizens are the main actors in a referendum – a

notion that is not applicable to government-initiated or government-sponsored referendums.

The reason for government actors to initiate a single referendum may vary (Morel, 2001), but the reason for including them in the decision-making apparatus seem to be recurring: They are tools for increasing democracy by bridging the gap between representatives and citizens (Gilljam & Jodal, 2006). The referendum institute is used to bring citizens closer to the decision making in representative democracies, but since representatives seem reluctant to give away to much power to citizens, the government-initiated referendum becomes a solution (cf. Morel, 2001; Rahat, 2009: 102). However, since the direct democratic and referendum democratic expectations on how referendums affect citizens rely on citizen legislation that bypasses representatives, the government-initiated popular votes negate the very mechanism of what gives citizens their civic education or empowerment. We need to rethink the impact referendums have on citizens.

1.1 Research question

The thesis is guided by the following research question:

- *How do government-initiated local referendums affect citizens' perceptions of democracy?*

The question addresses perceptions of democracy. The direct democratic civic education hypothesis and the referendum democracy concept also deal with how citizens perceive government and democracy. However, in this thesis I propose an entry to the topic by focusing on what elites want citizens to experience. Based on that government can frame, initiate and manipulate government-initiated referendums, the impact referendums have on citizens can instead be found in the relation between political representation and citizens. It also means that we should be less optimistic of how referendums affect citizens' perceptions of democracy: By lowering the amount of power citizens exercise and by raising that of government, we contradict the fundamental direct democratic elements of referendums. When referendums no longer are citizen-efforts to change agenda or policy, but an instrument government uses to further their own interest, the citizens' experiences are shaped according to what participation in such a referendum actually means – voting on a binary choice strategically presented by government, with the results being interpreted and (not always) implemented by political representatives and bureaucracy. Therefore a theory of how referendums affect citizens' perceptions of democracy needs to be further situated in the representative model. Since referendums are used to close a gap between representatives and citizens, and as a way of revitalizing representative democracy, possible effects on citizens' perceptions of democracy would be in

how citizens think of their elected representatives. I refer to this as the government-initiative hypothesis: *Citizens who experience local referendums will grant their local government increased trust and legitimacy.*

A second important part of the question is the locality. Theory of referendums, both direct democratic and “referendum democratic”, has been applied extensively to national referendums, and state-level referendums in the U.S., but inquiries on local-level decision making does not seem to be well established. In this thesis, the theoretical argument I make about the impact of government-initiated referendums is tested on local referendums. By assessing local referendums, this thesis also covers a gap in the literature. The low interest in local referendums among direct democratic empirical research is actually surprising since this school of democracy was developed with small-scale polities in mind (such as the Athenian democracy or Rousseau’s local decision-making).

The empirical examination of the theory is conducted on the Swedish use of local referendums. The Swedish case presents possibilities for drawing conclusions about local government-initiated referendums. With a large set of comparable political entities (290 municipalities) that have held referendums throughout the 2000’s, the case can provide insights into how citizens are affected by referendums. This analysis covers 63 referendums over the period 2002-2011. These were almost exclusively government-initiated, and the few (estimated to be between 8 or 10) who were citizen-initiated are still government-sponsored (Wallin, 2007; Kaufmann, 2011).

Independently pooled survey data with repeated measures from the SOM Institute is used to assess perceptions of democracy in a pre-test – post-test design (cf. Vedung, 2009: 243). The data is used to cover observations in perceptions of democracy one year before and one year after municipal referendums for the whole period¹. Thus, I am using 11 surveys with nationally representative samples for the years 2002-2012.

1.1.1 Purpose

This thesis has ambitions for explaining the effects of government-initiated referendums generally, but it also contends to shed light on the Swedish use of local referendums. Thus, this thesis has two aims, whereas the first is to promote a theoretical analysis of the how government-initiated referendums affect citizens, where the theory is more finely tuned to the lack of citizen control and power. In this thesis I also aim to explain how the Swedish use of local referendums has affected citizens.

¹ Except for the referendums of 2002, where the pre-referendum observation is made the same year as the referendum. See discussion under 3.3.1 *Observing referendums in survey data.*

While the use of local referendums in Sweden is the case which is used to test the theoretical argument, this thesis also has an ambition to evaluate the use of local referendums. Thus, by developing a theoretical argument for government-initiated referendums and testing it empirically, I make a contribution to the academic literature. With the empirical evidence from evaluating the Swedish case, this thesis also has properties that can contribute to the societal debate on the desired effects of referendums in general. Furthermore, analysing the impact of referendums with quantitative methods, a large set of referendums and over a long period of time, has to my knowledge not been done previously. With this approach to a case study I can find previously unexplored evidence.

Since this paper does not aim to evaluate individual referendums, there is no need to acknowledge the immediate goals and the reasons for holding a single referendum in single municipality. Such immediate goals, to name two discussed in the literature, could be fractured parties or alliances needing a nonpartisan decision (De Vreese, 2006) or a minority advocating a populist agenda (cf. Gerber, 1999). Instead, the question and purpose of this paper address the overarching perspectives for why referendums should be used at all – the democratic reasons for including referendums as a way of decision making in an otherwise representative government.

1.1.2 Terminology

In this thesis some terminology is recurring. Some definitional notes are here given beforehand. Perceptions of democracy, the dependent variable, is conditional upon theoretical arguments and is therefore defined later in the introduction to section 2 *Theory*.

- *Referendum*

A referendum is in this paper defined in its most generic sense as a popular consultation where all individuals who are eligible to vote have the right to participate (cf Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001: 22; cf. Wallin, 2007: 58). However, throughout this thesis I frequently refer to specific institutions such as government-initiated referendum or citizen-initiatives which have more specified conditions.

- *Government-initiated referendum*

The government-initiated referendum is a referendum which is held due to a political decision by a governing assembly. In this thesis local parliaments (municipal assemblies) decide upon such matters. Referendums that are initiated by government are in the literature sometimes described as institutionally initiated. Possibly, this could be interpreted to have a broader meaning. For conceptual clarity, “government-initiated” is used throughout the text.

- *Citizen initiative*

The citizen initiative is separate from other referendums in that it is initiated by citizens. Usually, a share of the population signs a petition which government then has to administer to a popular vote. Depending on legislation, such initiatives can bring new proposals to the agenda, or they can reject or approve of already existing proposals or legislation.

- *Municipal assembly – municipal board*

Municipal assembly (kommunfullmäktige) denotes the local parliaments of Swedish municipalities. Municipal board (kommunstyrelse) denotes the local executive governments of Swedish municipalities. Unlike national government, municipal boards also include representatives from the opposition.

2 Theory

In this chapter I will discuss why the study of referendums needs to move past the dichotomy of direct- and representative democracy. While advocates of direct democracy argue that an increased use of referendums would be collective self-government and work as civic education for the citizens, advocates of representative democracy criticise the instability referendums lead to, which could hardly have any positive effects on citizens. Referendums are occasionally studied as elements of direct democracy in an otherwise representative model (see for example Bowler & Donovan, 2004; Frey et al, 2001). Although this could be seen as moving towards another theoretical framework, this view still refers to referendums as direct democracy.

This leads us to expect that with an increased use of referendums, some of the positive outcomes direct democracy hopes for will come true – for example, referendums could vitalize other channels of democratic participation and increase the responsiveness of elected politicians.

My argument is that we cannot study the effects of referendums as elements of direct democracy when the referendums are not actually used in the purpose of self-government or strengthening the power of citizens. Instead, I promote an altered version of Mendehlson and Parkins' (2001) "referendum democracy", where the referendums are used as a tool for bridging a widening gap between representatives and citizens. The effects we can expect of referendums are therefore tied to the relation between representatives/elites and citizens. They can be observed in citizens' attitudes towards government – here conceptualised as perceptions of democracy.

"Perceptions of democracy" is not a concept tied only to the effects of government-initiated referendums. In this study, *perceptions of democracy constitute citizens' opinions and beliefs of their political environment*. As discussed above, when studying how government-initiated referendums affect citizens, it can be narrowed down to citizens opinions of their representatives.

For government-initiated local referendums, the focus on representatives/elites is of great importance. Since the votes are held by government, to strengthen government, these are the two dimensions in which referendums actually may affect how citizens perceive their local democracy. In the final section I construct a hypothesis, which I call the government-initiative hypothesis, from the democratic reasons for why government-initiated referendums are used: *Citizens who experience local referendums will grant their local government increased trust and legitimacy*. Here, trust and legitimacy are considered as parts and indicators of the overarching "perceptions of democracy".

The theoretical support for this hypothesis is that by being invited to participate in shaping policy, citizens feel that they are “being listened to” and therefore are more positive in how they perceive the local democracy.

In section 2.2, the direct democratic, normative, perspectives on referendums are described. In section 2.3, the relation between representative democracy and referendums is discussed from the referendum democracy theory/concept. Lastly, with focus on the relation between representatives and citizens, I present an altered version of the referendum democracy concept which is tuned more finely to the power of elites in the government-initiated referendum institute.

2.1 Direct democracy and referendums

When studying referendums it is necessary to anchor the institution in its historic tradition. Previous comments of the normative perspectives of referendums stem from the two traditions direct democracy and the representative democracy (Gilljam & Hermansson, 2003). Other similar concepts that capture this distinction exist, such as Lewin’s elite- or participation democracy (1970: 17-20). While attempts have been made to break this polarized image of democratic government by including more categories and by adapting them to specific countries, the two traditions of democracy are still the main source of analysis when discussing democratic government (cf. Wallin, 2007). In this text I will focus on the direct democratic tradition, since it is from this tradition most theorizing on the effects referendums may have on citizens perceptions of democracy originate.

The literature on referendums is historically largely descriptive or normative (Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004: 463). This may very well be because of the close ties between direct democracy as the ideal state and referendums as its practical implementation. Indeed, to some extent it is fair to say that holding referendums is synonymous with increasing direct democratic ideas and values (Dahl, 1998: 93, 105-108). While other direct democratic tools can be used, such as enhancing user and stakeholder influence in a policy process, the referendum is considered as the most pure expression of the will of the people (Jungar, 2007: 14-15). Therefore, the values from the direct democratic tradition form the way we think about referendums. Through Rousseau and three modern direct democracy theorists, Pateman (1970), Barber (2003) and Kaufmann (2005; 1996), we can divine the characteristics of referendums from the direct democratic point of view.

With this overview key concepts, which are necessary for studying referendums, are identified. These concepts still guides the discussion on participatory government and decision making through popular votes.

First, it is necessary to pin down the aims of direct democracy, what the ambitions are, why it is desirable. While some of the desired outcomes of direct government may seem abstract, they relate very clearly to citizenship and what

the act of participation would bring for citizens. Here it is customary to start with the Athenian democracy. It is clear that the city state Athens differed from other contemporary and later polities in how they regarded the population as citizens, as opposed to subjects. Such a distinction gives rise to serious consequences regarding what the citizen ought to do – responsibilities and privileges.

The political power was in essence based on a rotating mandate between citizens who were randomly selected. By participating in the deliberation and voting on public matters, the Athenians were exercising a popular rule which has yet to be reproduced. While the democracy in Athens suffered from several flaws, making it seriously un-democratic², it has spawned the concept of self-government. This is a central concept that still holds great value for the participatory tradition(s) (Dahl, 1989: 100). *Collective/popular self-government* even appears in definitions of democracy in contemporary political science literature (e.g. Setälä, 2009: 1)

A sentiment similar to self-government is later revitalized in Rousseau's general will (Setälä, 1999: 35-40). The general will is not the individual's right to govern oneself, but a more collective and deliberative process of government, where people make decisions based on the common good. Still, it bears resemblance to the greek participatory ideal. Although no literature suggests that the citizens of Athens chose active participation *over* representation, the discord between the direct and representative traditions become evident when examining Rousseau's thoughts on the matter. When discussing referendums, the general will can be described as a collective opinion on public matters, which takes form from the preferences of individuals (cf. Riley, 1970: 92-93).

This often quoted passage in *Of the Social Contract* illustrates how the general will, as opposed to the distorted representation, is believed by Rousseau to create a better output on citizens lives:

When we see among the happiest people in the world bands of peasants regulating the affairs of state under an oak tree, and always acting wisely, can we help feeling a certain contempt for the refinements of other nations, which employ so much skill and effort to make themselves at once illustrious and wretched? (Rousseau, 1762, paragraph 1-2)

The normative theory of direct democracy of today bears resemblance to both the ancient Greek practices and to Rousseau's general will. Collective self-

² E.g. regarding the very restrictive citizenship policy, where a majority of the population was regarded as non-citizens. The attendance and participation was also very low, making it less direct democratic than it is usually attributed. (Wallin, 2007: 15-19)

government and participation can still be described as virtues that have positive effects on citizens. For example Kaufmann (2005: 78) argues that direct democracy (implemented by referendums) promotes economic growth, a strengthened civil society and therefore also makes people happier. This chain argument resembles what other theorists discuss as self-fulfilment. Through active participation in the governance of oneself, citizens feel better than when decisions are made over their heads (cf. Barber, 2003; Pateman, 1970; Walsh, 2007). In this thesis I will consider the “self-fulfilment hypothesis” as a part of the civic education hypothesis – the desired outcome of direct democracy, which is more clearly stated in empirical research (Mendelsohn & Cutler, 2000).

Participating in democratic activities is an educational effort which fosters enlightened and tolerant citizens. This is not just increasing the citizen’s knowledge of political matters, but creates an environment of truly collective decision making (Pateman, 1970: 42-43; cf. Adman, 2003: 142-148). This civic education hypothesis puts the act of collective participation in focus, as Barber notes:

The need for politics arises when some *action of public* consequence becomes *necessary* and when men must thus make a *public choice* that is *reasonable* in the face of *conflict* despite the *absence of an independent ground* of judgement (Barber, 2003: 122)

Participation in this sense, which share similarities with Dewey’s vision of American democracy (Whipple, 200: 161), is focused solely on the responsibilities and action of citizens. This view of democracy is very far removed from the representative democracy that, according to Manin (1997), is shaped by elites. This does not mean that direct democratic theory is false or undesired. However, it means that direct democracy cannot be *observed* in any contemporary democracy³. Therefore, direct democracy and civic education does not apply well when studying government-initiated referendums and their effects on citizens. First of all, referendums do not occur at a rate that would motivate civic education. Secondly, participation in referendums where question, alternatives on the ballot and whether the results are followed or not, does not correspond to direct democratic theory. Furthermore, the deliberation, both between citizens and in terms of media coverage, which would have to precede the actual vote, is not as established as it would need to be – especially with regards to the Swedish case (cf. Wallin, 2007: 213-216). It should here be noted that Barber or Pateman probably would not regard the government-initiated

³ Even Switzerland is only defined as a “semi-direct democracy” (Kobach, 1994)

referendums studied in this paper as direct democratic⁴. Still, the study of referendums is centred on this democracy tradition (Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001: 4; Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004: 464-465).

2.1.1 Referendums as the implementation of direct democracy

How do referendums today fit into the discussion of direct democracy above? Specifically, how can direct democracy be efficiently organized? Some complications arise when answering this question in 21st century democracies. The one problem that is always debated is the scale problem (cf. Parkinson, 2003). If it is no longer possible for citizens to meet in a single place and together decide upon matters, other arrangements have to be made. To tackle that problem representative democracy has a very favourable position: By electing representatives and giving them the rights to make decisions it is possible to democratically manage very large entities. Contract philosophy, which Rousseau draws upon, has the similar notion of pooling the freedoms of citizens to the state. Direct democracy has had to deliver a response to this problem, and referendums have become the solution.

Letting the electorate vote in referendums is *practicing* direct democracy (Amnå, 2003: 121-124). When keeping politics as an amateur activity it is imperative to bypass professional legislators, which the referendum institute allow for (ibid: 106-107). Although institutions that implement the decisions have to exist, these institutions should not hold the power to alter the decision made by citizens. This is a crucial point for the direct democratic view of the referendum institute. If it is to have the desired educative effects on citizens, it has to resemble collective self-government as closely as possible. This does not allow for post-voting changes made by politicians.

The practice of government-initiated referendums violates all the above described conditions for referendums to be direct democratic. Since government decides upon agenda, the choices on the ballot and how to frame the issue, we cannot regard them as direct democratic. Furthermore, government-initiated referendums are often advisory (Setälä, 2006: 711), and those of Sweden are always advisory, which means that even if citizens makes a decision that would incidentally mirror a general will, elected representatives may manipulate it to suite their own goals. It should here be noted that this practice of post-election changes in how a decision made by popular vote should be implemented also exists in polities where the referendums actually are binding (Gerber, 2004).

⁴ As a matter of fact, Barber (2003: 284-287) gives practical advices for how a referendum process should be structured. Through mandatory media coverage of the issue, and multi-choice format of the ballot, citizens would get the proper civic education.

Direct democracy does not necessarily exclude a representative mechanism, representation can be an efficient way of solving the scale-problem; however, representation in this sense bears little resemblance to the competitive election democracies favoured in contemporary nation states. Yet again, Rousseau can be consulted for a view on how representation ought to work to best facilitate the general will: The representative assembly would serve as a forum where opinions and attitudes confront each other, not in a one-way communication but in a constructive discussion (Setälä, 1999: 42-45). Moreover, the representatives should not be bound to a certain interest group, such as a party, but should instead look to the electorate they represent for opinions and standpoints on issues. Still, as discussed earlier, the ideal direct democratic way of government would not be legislation by intermediating discussants, but by the electorate themselves. A representative assembly as contemplated by Rousseau is thus still a compromise, or rather a necessary evil, to solve the scale problem in larger political entities. Another solution is the Athenian one, were legislators were chosen randomly (Setälä, 1999: 44).

The need for a solution to the impracticality of direct democracy has spawned a number of institutions advocated by direct democrats. All of them can in some way be tied to the referendum as the implementing practice. The citizen initiative, recall, and veto on constitutional amendments are examples in how this can be institutionally arranged (Gilljam, 2003). While the need for, and motivation behind, these institutions differ, they are all executed by a popular vote. The referendum has become the most efficient way to solve the scale problem, either traditionally at the ballot or by the later postal and electronic voting (for a Swedish example see SOU 1999:12). Indeed, the referendum allows for deciding upon a clearly defined issue without “tainting” the pure will of the people.

Other political tools that could be considered as, at least partly, direct democratic are increased stakeholder and user focus in governance. Examples of this on local level decision making is youth councils, hearings of politicians, citizen dialogue projects etc. While it is unclear whether such projects should be regarded as expressions of direct democracy, advocates often call upon the virtues of direct democracy. Whereas one aspect is the legitimizing function, say, consulting a youth council may have on where to place a youth centre, the other is how the act of participation affects the citizen (Montin, 1998).

In conclusion, in a direct democratic ideal type it is expected that citizens gain civic education through participation in referendums. From the responsibilities of making decisions for themselves and others, citizens become more tolerant, open and gain political knowledge. A second desired outcome, which goes hand in hand with civic education, is self-fulfilment. Although I would not separate the two, the self-fulfilment indicates that participating in politics and self-government is not only good governance which makes people into more virtuous citizens, it heightens the quality of life as well (Kaufmann, 2005; Pateman, 1970). However, as noted earlier, this sort of theory is not applicable to government-initiated referendums, and rarely any other type of referendum (Gerber, 2004; cf. Kissane,

2009). In order to study the effects government-initiated we have to move beyond the ideal type that direct democracy represents.

2.2 Referendum democracy and representation

In the previous section referendums were discussed as “practicing direct democracy”. The institute effectively solves the scale-problem and the problem of mediating elites. While both may be true this is not really how referendums have been used in modern liberal democracies (Ranney & Butler, 1994: 2-3; Jungar, 2007: 81-89). As Qvortrup notes regarding the motives for implementing referendums in the U.S.:

The referendum was not linked to the ideals of ancient Athens, the New England town meetings, the Swiss *Landesgemeinden* or radical theories of participatory democracy [...] (Qvortrup, 2005: 12).

As an example, we can look to California where different varieties of state-level referendums exist mainly as checks-and-balances which can hold politicians accountable. In the usual separation of powers scenario, the three branches of government which control each other are the legislative, judiciary and executive (Qvortrup, 2005: 15). Here we could almost see the citizen-initiated referendum as a fourth branch which limits the powers of the legislative branch. The referendums some European countries are obliged to hold when amending their constitution works from a similar logic: Limiting the power of elected politicians, and reminding them of the electorate’s preferences. (ibid).

Making use of referendums as an extension of the separation of powers does not share the aims of direct democracy as described earlier. If one argues that referendums are a means to defining the general will, and another argue that they serve as a controlling mechanism on representatives – does this merit the same effects referendums have on citizens’ perception of democracy? Furthermore, can government-initiated referendums (such as in Swedish municipalities) even qualify as a control of the representatives, when representatives are the ones dictating the problem, the possible solutions and if the results should be implemented?

If we conclude that referendums as they occur in contemporary liberal democracies do not share the aims of those visualized by direct democrats, then they should not be studied as such. It could here be argued that just because referendums of today do not live up to all direct democratic ideals, that does not infer that they do not capture the essence of direct democracy – much like how representative assemblies (parliaments) have never been truly representative of its

electorate, but still catches the essence of representation (cf. Setälä, 1999: 45-46). Still, having differing democratic reasons for why referendums are used, and then formulating them in accordance, does affect the effects they have on citizens' perceptions of democracy.

The focal point which separates the government-initiated referendums and the separation of powers-referendums from the direct democratic traditions is the view on elites. While the two former actually promote the interaction between elites and citizens the direct democratic tradition would see referendums as the opposite; a way to negate the powers of elites.

Even if we contend that the usages of referendums fulfil some direct democratic criteria, they lack the important aspects of bypassing representatives. Categorizing referendums as tools for increased direct democracy is misleading. Only if direct democracy as a concept is redefined to a minimal standard of "citizen influence" can such a stance be adequate when studying effects of referendums. Similarly, studying referendums from the representative democracy tradition, where they are seen as only hindrances for stability and as undermining the capacity of ruling, provides no better possibilities of explaining how decision making through popular votes affect citizens (cf. Setälä, 1999: 48).

The perspective of direct democracy, or Schumpeterian representative democracy for that matter, does not provide useful analytical tools for studying how citizens perceive democracy after experiencing a referendum – especially not government-initiated referendums. Measuring the effects of government-initiated referendums in the desired outcomes of direct democracy could result in a false rejection of participatory democracy theory, but it also constitutes a blunt analytical tool for this paper (cf. Qvortrup, 2005: 12). Conceptualizing referendums in a representative democracy by other means than a dichotomous scale is needed.⁵

Taking the direct democracy out of referendums is not a new thought. For example, in 2001 Mendelsohn and Parkin (2001: 1-5) argued that even though referendums may be an invention of direct democracy, the institute has become as much a part of representative democracy as any other way of shaping public policy. Their solution is one "democracy system", instead of two competing (direct – representative), which they call referendum democracy. The closest to a definition presented by them is:

[...] referendum democracy – a system in which the use, possible use, and threatened use of the referendum are fully integrated into the decision-making

⁵ It should be noted that Swedish research on the matter usually contends that referendums, and other institutes dubbed as "democracy projects", are direct democratic elements in an otherwise representative democracy (see for example Gilljam & Jodal, 2006).

apparatus of representative, liberal democracy (Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001: 1-2)

This new conceptualization is presented in the introduction to an anthology of how national referendums have impacted core institutions in liberal democracies. Thus, the authors do not really delve into how the causal mechanisms in such a theoretical direction would look in closer examination. However, Mendelsohn and Parkin's discussion actualises two dimensions of referendums that may further our understanding of their function in an otherwise representative democracy – (1) the role of mediating elites and (2) the reason for holding referendums.

Regarding (1) mediating elites, it is of great importance to note that the results of referendums, even if they are binding, always have to pass through elites. In a study of citizen initiated referendums in American states Gerber et al. (2004: 4) challenge the view that “[...] victory at the polls implies direct and substantial policy change”, something they argue to be false depending on which type of policy is voted on. One of the reasons for that result is that actors (organizations or networks) who press for a referendum often disperse after election day, while elites (legislative and bureaucratic) stay organised afterwards, making it hard for citizens to evaluate whether the implementation of the referendum results were followed, altered or simply ignored (ibid: 20). The most important conclusion from this study, along with an earlier publication on the matter (Gerber et al, 2001), is that the results of a referendum always have to pass through the interference of elected officials as well as a non-political bureaucracy. Even if the results of a referendum are followed by both legislative and bureaucratic officials, this severely limits the directness of referendums. Furthermore, these studies analyzed citizen initiatives, some of them binding. When compared to advisory government-initiated referendums, the binding citizen-initiatives are more resembling of direct democracy.

The second dimension, the reason for holding referendums, has a profound impact on why referendums cannot be analyzed as direct democracy. The immediate reasons for deciding on policy by popular vote surely differ a lot between states and even more between separate cases. However, when discussing the motivation for holding referendums as such, a pattern emerges. In normative theory on direct democracy the two reasons for holding referendums were that it was a way to capture the pure popular/general will and civic education. However, the actual reasons for holding referendums seems to stray from this path substantially. In her review of normative theories of referendums Maija Setälä (1999: 43-47) concludes that the reasons for holding referendums may vary depending on how representation is viewed. The two representative ideals Setälä identifies are the microcosm/delegate and trustee/independence models. In the former, representative assemblies are thought to portrait their electorate, a view which was previously mentioned. The latter is derived from theorists as Schumpeter and, to some extent, Burke, who argues that representatives should be able to make decision based on their own, better judgement (Wallin, 2007: 26).

Following this distinction of representative ideals, referendums are, at least in theory, motivated differently. In the trustee/independence model, referendums are hardly necessary at all. First, it is very unlikely that people actually have a “will” in most cases and second, if a will does exist, it is probably undesirable to bind the legislative assembly to it (Setälä, 1999: 47). With the delegate/microcosm model, where citizens delegate sovereignty and decision making to representatives mirroring their opinions, it is easier to motivate the use of referendums. In this ideal Setälä discerns a basic principle-agent problem where the honest principle is the people and the, sometimes dishonest, agents are the elected politicians. The principle can hold their agents accountable through general elections, however, referendums may here constitute another correctional mechanism where voters may rebuke unfavoured policies (Setälä, 1999: 46).

The principle-agent argument for referendums resembles another theoretical direction taken by A.V. Dicey. Dicey’s normative theory, by Qvortrup (2005: 42-53) cited as the only theory dealing solely with referendums, dictates that the referendum institute is “the people’s veto”. Dicey introduced referendums as a check on party tyranny in late 19th century Britain. He argued that a political party could obtain a parliamentary majority which did not match its actual power, thus creating a situation where changes in the constitution could be made without the electorates consent (ibid: 48). In regular policy decisions this was not a problem. However, when irrevocable constitutional changes were made, they should be sufficiently anchored in the electorate’s opinions⁶ (ibid). This theory captures the constitutional referendums, and those of California and Switzerland, very well. For example, in his study of Swiss national referendums, Papadopoulos (2007) finds empirical support for the argument that if popular votes are used as a controlling mechanism, where the people are regarded as a veto-player, this increases the responsiveness of elected representatives.

However, when studying the effects of government-initiated referendums it could not be justified to see the citizens as the ones who correct or control the representatives. Therefore, the referendum democracy concept opens for a more nuanced explanation of what referendums are and how they affect citizens’ perceptions of democracy, but it lacks explanations when moving to a context where institutions favour the elites. When studying government-initiated referendums, I thus have to further adapt the expected effects on citizens’ perceptions of democracy to representative democracy.

⁶ According to Qvortrup, Dicey expresses a belief in between the two models of representation that were mentioned earlier: “Parliament may be wiser than the citizens who elect it” and “Parliament which does not represent its electors is not an assembly which illustrates the benefits of a representative system” (Dicey quoted in Qvortrup, 2005: 52)

2.3 Government-initiated referendums and citizens

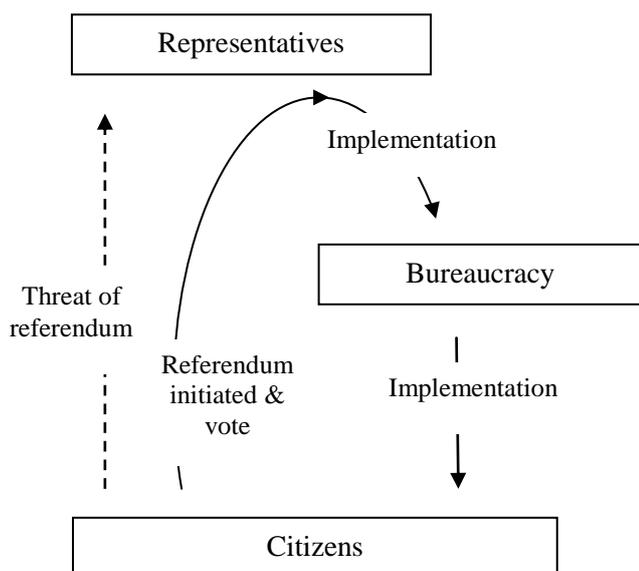
In this section I will present theory on how local referendums affect citizens' perceptions of democracy based on the referendum democracy concept, but revised and adjusted to government-initiated referendums. I propose that government-initiated referendums cannot have the effects presented by the normative direct democratic tradition, nor can they empower citizens as referendum democracy explains. If government-initiated referendums have any effects on citizens, it would instead be in relation to the representatives who initiate the referendum. In this section I will also turn to case specific material, such as national government reports and legislation. Although this may impede the possibilities to generalize the findings of this study, the losses in validity of not taking contextual factors into consideration would be more severe.

If we conclude that referendums are not an expression of direct democracy, but also admit that they are not a built in part of representative democracy, how should we then approach the study of their effects on citizens? The referendum democracy concept, and the subsequent discussion on representation, presents an alternative conceptualization. However, the assumptions that “the use, possible use, and threatened use of the referendum are fully integrated into the decision-making apparatus” (Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001: 1-2) do not correspond to the institutional setting of government-initiated referendums. If government actors (in the Swedish case, municipal boards and municipal assemblies) have a monopoly on initiating referendums then the “possible use, and threatened use” of such popular votes is severely limited. If we look to Swedish legal regulations before the constitutional amendment of 2010, it was impossible for citizen initiatives to successfully be put to a popular vote without the support of a majority in the local parliament (SFS: 1994). Such institutions make studying government-initiated referendums as “people’s veto” irrelevant.

The concept of referendum democracy could be seen as a step in the right direction – by adapting referendums to the context of representative democracy it can explain how binding citizen-initiatives and mandatory referendums work (cf. Mendelsohn & Parkins, 2001: 19). It also provides suitable ways of studying the effects these referendums have on citizens, such as empowerment in relation to elected representatives. As noted earlier, however, they only apply to a “referendum democratic model” where citizens are the focal point around which referendums are organised. This constitutes a flaw when conducting empirical analysis on states that minimize the citizen influence over the referendum process, except for in the actual vote. Therefore, when studying government-initiated local referendums we must yet again look to *why* they are used.

A graphical representation of the differences between the referendum democracy concept and the government-initiated referendums studied here can be found in figure 2.3.1.

Referendum democracy



(Advisory) Government-initiated referendums

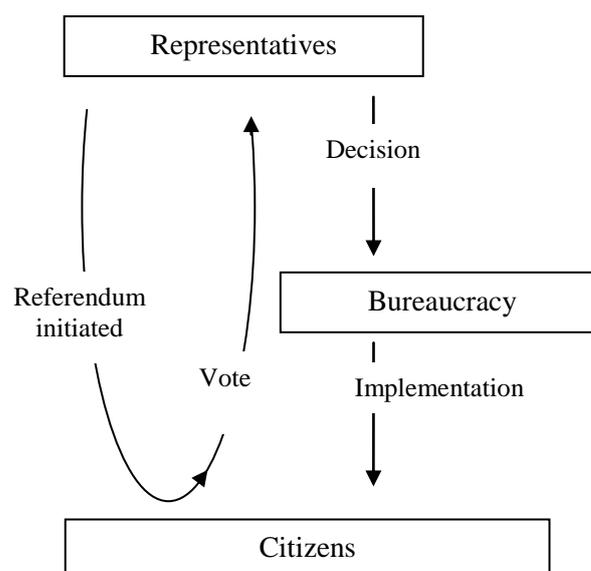


Figure 2.3.1: Two models of referendums in contemporary representative states

2.3.1 Why use referendums

In the discussion on referendum democracy and the people's veto, some general reasons for using referendums to decide on public policy are given. Following that discussion we can view referendums as a mechanism that corrects elected politicians when they deviate from the path voters put them on. However, what are the reasons for government-initiated referendums and for Swedish municipalities? If we look to the committee of local democracy's review (1993:90) an increased use of referendums locally were deemed desired, however, the reason for this was not necessarily to increase the power of citizens, but to "strengthen the positions of elected and parties" (Wallin, 2007: 82). The resulting law in 1994 saw an introduction of the citizen initiative. If five percent of the electorate signed a petition, local parliament had to vote on whether to hold a referendum or not. Most such initiatives failed since a majority of the elected had to vote in favour of a referendum (Wallin, 2007: 85). Thus, even the citizen-initiated votes have to be sponsored by local government.

Seven years later, in SOU 2000:1 "A sustainable democracy!" (*En uthållig demokrati!*), the focus on direct democracy was very clear. The overarching perspective of the report was in favour of "a participatory democracy with deliberative qualities" (author's translation) (SOU 2000:1, p. 23). The report concluded that even though the representative values are irreplaceable, and although the conflict between direct and representative democracy is substantial, the state should pursue more ways of democratic influence outside of the

representative arena. In the long run, this would result in a more legitimate representation (SOU, 2000:1, p. 245). While both reports, and the one of 2000 in particular, argued in favour of increased direct-democratic governance, they also stay confined to the frames of representative democracy. Along with reports from the SNS Democracy Council (Esaiasson & Rothstein, 1995; Petersson 1998; Petersson, 2000) it is possible to discern a view that while Swedish democracy in large works good, it suffers from a participatory deficit, which may affect the legitimacy of the current democratic system. Government-initiated referendums here become a way to bridge this gap between the electorate and the elected.

I would say that this constitutes a different understanding of the usage of referendums compared to direct democratic and referendum democratic theory. When national government argues that an increased use of local referendums will strengthen elected representatives, and bridge the gap between political representatives and their citizens, it is not direct democracy. Furthermore, by reducing the directness of these votes, by not allowing for citizen initiatives and by making them advisory, there is not much directness left in the policy-process. Instead, referendums are attributed a legitimizing function, a tool for making (local) democracy stronger, and to increase the trust in representatives. Therefore, the changes in how citizens perceive their local democracy is not due to that they are empowered and have the possibility to correct government policy. Neither is it tied to that citizens through collective self-government and direct decision making are civically educated. Instead, the expectancies on the positive effects of referendums should be lowered and attached to that citizens are *invited* to participate in a part of a decision making process. The positive effects of government-initiated referendums would therefore be that by giving citizens the possibility of partaking in shaping policy, citizens in turn trust and grant their elected representatives increased legitimacy (cf. Gilljam & Hermansson, 2003: 20). From this theoretical argument the following hypothesis can be constructed: *Citizens who experience local government-initiated referendums will grant their local government increased trust and legitimacy.* This government-initiative hypothesis is an expression of the legitimizing function that these referendums are thought to have.

2.3.2 Representatives and citizens in Swedish municipalities

As mentioned earlier, one of the key reasons for why direct democracy theory is ineffective when studying referendums is the impossibility of getting rid of meddling elites. Furthermore, if we agree to the notion that referendums should be studied as a part of the representative system, and not an expression of the opposing democracy tradition, elites should not be regarded as obstacles, but as a part of a mutual communication. This excludes the possibility of referendums as a way for the people to govern themselves without interference as envisaged by Rousseau (1762) and Pateman (1970).

The perspective of government-initiated referendums could be said to acknowledge two “wills” of the people, one through delegated sovereignty (representation) and one through direct voting (SKL, 2013: 21-22). Of these competing wills, the model of government-initiated referendums already favours the representative will as more legitimate; otherwise the citizen-initiative would be an equally supported tool of citizen influence as its government-initiated counterpart. Since this balance of power is already established, it is questionable of what worth these votes are in terms of letting citizens themselves decide upon public policy.

That this struggle between citizens and elites is skewed in the elites’ favour is expressed in another institutional factor in Swedish legislation: All Swedish, local and national, referendums are always advisory. By being consultative, local government may very well disregard the results of a vote, be it citizen or government-initiated (SFS 1991: 900, chap. 5 §34). As displayed in figure 2.3.1, this means that the municipal assembly first votes on whether to hold a referendum or not, and afterward votes on to what extent the results of the poll should be followed. Although Morel (2001: 48) notes that “who initiates the referendum?” is the most important variable when studying any effects referendums may have, that the referendums are consultative is not without importance (ibid: 55). It could be argued that completely disregarding the results of a popular vote would be so devastating for the ruling political parties in the following municipal assembly election that they would avoid it (Wallin, 2007: 127). This could also be the reason for why so few citizen-initiatives were unsuccessful in getting the approval of the municipal assemblies – politicians did not want to risk punishment in the general elections for disregarding the results of the referendums (SKL, 2013)⁷.

At best, citizens participate in shaping policy, but never completely decide upon an issue. Thus, if these referendums produce the trust and legitimacy (i.e. favourable perceptions of democracy) that the government-initiative hypothesis expects, it because of that citizens are *invited to participate in shaping policy*. In return for “being listened to”, citizens are more positive in how they perceive democracy. This causal chain has to work in order for government-initiated referendums to have their desired effects, increased legitimacy and trust, on citizens’ perceptions of democracy. When compared to the direct democratic and referendum democratic expectations on referendums, this is more modest, but it is also more frail. With “referendum democratic” institutions, such as the citizen initiative in California, citizens may actually take action to correct politicians and

⁷ When the citizen-initiative was strengthened in 2011, several referendums in 2012-2013 (which are not included in this analysis) were disregarded by municipal assemblies. This has led to great controversy and it is unclear how they have affected the outcome in the general elections of 2014 (SKL, 2013).

are thus empowered. Here, however, we have to rely on some already existing support of politicians.

Lastly, a third factor is that the use of local referendums is sporadic (Election Authority 1). While this effectively eliminates the problem of voter fatigue due to too frequent votes, it could also implicate that citizens are unfamiliar with what to expect from referendums (cf. Ranney & Butler, 1994: 20-21). When pooled together over the 10-year period studied in this thesis, the local referendums held in Sweden are not few, but it should also be considered that only few municipalities hold referendums, and generally only hold one referendum. Any effects a referendum may have on citizens can therefore vanish quickly. If referendums are to have any lasting effects they would have to be a recurring practice (cf. *ibid*).

2.3.3 In conclusion

To explain the effects of referendums I have turned to why they are used. The theoretical discussion started with the direct democratic view of collective self-government. The referendum institute was here seen as the direct democratic way of government in contemporary large states without having to rely on representation. Through truly collective decision-making, citizens are here thought to gain civic virtues and education such as increased political knowledge, tolerance and respect. However, this view neglects how referendums are used in representative democracies, especially regarding those that are government-initiated. Studying contemporary referendums as elements of direct democracy therefore does not capture (1) what referendums are implemented to do and (2) will possibly reject ideal type direct democratic theory without actually studying direct democracy.

By adapting referendums to representative government, the referendum democracy concept by Mendelsohn and Parkin (2001) specified that popular votes serve as controlling mechanisms where voters were considered as veto-players who could reject or promote policy. In such a scenario citizens are empowered in relation to elites, while the direct democratic elements of self-government are diminished. However, their argument relies on that citizens can exercise this control by initiating referendums and by binding legislators to their will, which does not apply to the government-initiated referendums. Furthermore, as Gerber (2004, 2001) pointed out, even if referendums are initiated by citizens, and even if government is bound to adhere to the results, elites still find ways to manipulate policy in ways that favour their goals.

To further adjust the study of referendums to the representative model they take place in, it was argued that their effects on citizens are found in the relation between citizens and representation. Referendum democratic theory specifies that this occurs through increasing the power of citizens, which does not apply to government-initiated referendums. Government-initiated referendums can only

affect citizens' perceptions of democracy through the invitation to participate in shaping policy, not through empowerment. The effects of that kind of participation can thus be narrowed down to how citizens think of the local democracy and representation. The possible positive effects, expressed in the government-initiative hypothesis, that can be observed are in citizens' perceptions of democracy – trust and legitimacy of government.

3 Methodology

The impact government-initiated referendums may have on perceptions of democracy is tested on the case of local referendums in Swedish municipalities over a period of 11 years⁸. To reveal whether referendums contribute to changes in the citizens' perceptions of democracy, I employ national survey data for the period 2002-2012 from the SOM-institute. The surveys are independent cross sections but with repeated questions. With access to several years of independently pooled cross sections it is possible to make observations before and after referendums, while not having to rely on empirical evidence from single cross-sections. The measures of perceptions of democracy are (1) Satisfaction with local democracy, (2) trust in municipal boards generally and (3) trust in the municipal board of the respondent's municipality.

In this chapter the methodological choices are discussed in greater detail. In the first section I discuss why the case study design is necessary and why the Swedish local referendums can provide evidence that can add to our knowledge of referendums in general, and government-initiated referendums in particular. This section also includes a description of the case to provide a contextual framework. Section 3.2 *Survey data* briefly describes the surveys which are used to make pre-referendum and post-referendum observations in perceptions of democracy. In section 3.3 *Measures*, the measures of independent and dependent variables are described and discussed. Lastly, in section 3.4 *Analyzing perceptions of democracy* I discuss the practical methods and introduce the statistical tests.

3.1 The case

Since many contributions to the study of referendums are made from evidence based on the experiences of one country (ex. Jungar, 2007; Franklin et al. 1994), a single-country case study is not a surprising design. The publications that incorporate several countries are often descriptive and try to find differences and similarities in how referendums work under different constitutions (ex. Ranney & Butler, 1994; Qvortrup, 2014). The most important aspect for using a case study design is that referendums are regulated in different ways depending on country.

⁸ As a reference, in Gerring's (2004: 343-344) typology of case study designs, this could probably qualify as a type 3 case study.

For example, several countries regulate their referendums through quorums which, depending on voter turnout, make referendums legitimate or not⁹. Comparing those cases to countries without a quorum regulation makes the analysis difficult – especially if we have a large sample of referendums with both high and low turnout (such as in this thesis). Another factor which complicates cross-national comparisons is whether referendums can be initiated by citizens and/or government – a factor which is of great importance in this study. In fact, an important reason for studying Sweden is that the country has had a long period where almost all referendums were government-initiated, making it possible to develop theory and test it without interfering elements of citizen-initiatives.

For this thesis, the case study also has other qualities that outweigh the values of a more extensive study. First, this is a study of local politics where the referendums take place in sub-national entities (municipalities). Although (almost) all states allow for decentralised government, the legal regulations of local parliaments vary greatly between countries (John, 2001: 17). Furthermore, since my research question asks for changes in perceptions of democracy we have to take the availability of material into consideration. With access to annual national surveys with repeated measures on perceptions of democracy for the period 2002-2012, the Swedish case provides opportunities for exploring the empirical evidence. This time frame was chosen mostly due to data availability – all three questions on perceptions of democracy are included first in 2002. However, it still constitutes an extensive period for studying local referendums,

It should be stated that I deviate from the case studies of national referendums in some aspects. The first, and perhaps most obvious, difference is regarding the level on which the referendums take place. With local decision-making I have a large amount of autonomous polities (290 municipalities) that in theory act independently of each other. Other studies of sub-national referendums have mostly considered state-level direct democracy in the U.S. (ex. Matsusaka, 2005), and similarities between such states and Swedish municipalities are small, if nonexistent. However, analysing Swedish municipal referendums presents the possibility to study a much larger set of equal political entities empirically than analyses of national or state-level referendums does. Another advantage of studying the local referendums in Sweden is that all municipalities adhere to the same legal regulations regarding referendums, which neither American states nor nations do. These legal regulations also remain unchanged during the years 2002-2010¹⁰. A similar approach is not possible on the national level due to crucial differences in what referendums constitute (cf. Setälä, 2006: 711).

⁹ The line is often drawn at 50 %. With participation beneath that line, the referendum is illegitimate. (Jungar, 2005)

¹⁰ The only referendum held in 2011 was in Ängelholm. This was citizen initiated but was still included on the analysis.

Using survey data as the empirical material is not an all too frequently used method in case studies of referendums (for other studies using the method see Bowler & Donovan, 2004; Tolbert et al, 2003). However, by pooling repeated national cross-sectional surveys it is possible to gain knowledge on the impact government-initiated referendums may have on citizens not just at one point of time, but over time. Because of the long period, 2002-2012, I can also include many more referendums than possible in a single cross section. The Swedish case thus constitutes a case for developing and testing a theoretical argument of government-initiatives (cf. Golden, 2005: 6)

An observation on the Swedish case is that, with regards to the dependent variables, Sweden is a tough case for any theory of effects of referendums, even the more modest government-initiative hypothesis presented here. Swedish citizens are generally satisfied with the democratic governance and although less keen on liking their representatives, the democratic institutions are stable and are reviewed as such by citizens (Möller, 1998; SOM-institute, 2013: 9, 40). Since attitudes towards government and democracy are already favourable, making them even better with any intervention, such as letting local governments hold referendums, could be hard. However, as stated in the theory section, the referendums were made available to municipalities in order to infuse legitimacy into local democracy, and in order to close an increasing gap between representatives and citizens¹¹. When adding this to the fact that the government-initiative hypothesis I introduced relies on a somewhat frail causal chain (that citizen's feel listened to after being invited to participate in a popular vote) we can still be sceptical towards the extent the local referendums have affected citizens' perceptions of democracy.

3.1.1 A guide to local referendums in Sweden

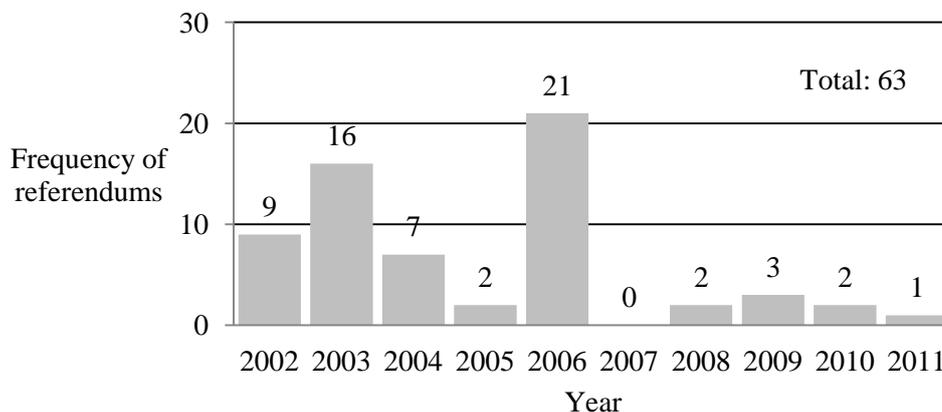
The Swedish case of local referendums presents an intriguing case for the student of referendums. Since the year 1980 the constitution allows for referendums to be held not just in national legislation but for municipal- and regional-level policy decisions. As of 2014 the election authority reports that 120 local referendums have taken place (Election authority 1)¹². This may seem like a large figure, but one should remember that these are spread over more than three decades and 290 individual municipalities. Not every municipality has held a referendum, and those who have seldom hold a second (ibid). According to Wallin (2007: 74-80) this may be because of a lack of a "referendum culture". This would be true also

¹¹ That a gap exists is certain. However, portraying it as "increasing" is hard to justify when reviewing national averages (SOM-institute: 2013: 9)

¹² With exception for Luleå 2003 "local road use" and in Norsjö 2003 "Water protection project" (which are reported in Kaufmann, 2011, 258). All referendums included in the analysis are listed in Appendix A1.

for national level, with only six referendums from 1922, and the regional level with one referendum in 2013¹³. The use of local referendums has increased when comparing the 2000's and 2010's to the period before (Election authority 1), with peaks in 2003 and 2006 when the municipalities of Stockholm voted on congestion charges. During the timeframe of the analysis in this thesis, 2002-2012, 63 referendums were held. I therefore have a substantial amount of referendums that can be studied. The yearly frequencies of local referendums are reported in graph 3.1.1.

Until 1994 the Local Government Act of 1977 regulated the municipalities' use of local referendums. Referendums could then be initiated only by the local government (institutionally initiated) and were always advisory (Wallin, 2007: 78). With the constitutional amendment of 1994 the act changed, but only in detail. However, the amendment of 1994 saw the new Municipal Referenda Act (SFS 1994:692) introduced, which specified how a referendum should be carried out. With this change, the citizen initiative was also introduced. Citizens could then initiate a referendum-process by getting 5 % of the population in a municipality to sign a petition. However, only if a majority in the municipal assembly approved of the referendum would it actually be held. Kaufmann (2011: 258) reports that about 150 such petitions were successful in surpassing the 5 % threshold, but that only 10 of those were not denied by respective municipal assembly. Wallin (2007: 124) lists 84 successful



Graph 3.1.1: Frequencies of local referendums in Sweden by year *Source:* Kaufmann (2011: 265-267) and the Swedish Election Authority (Election Authority 1)

¹³ County of Västerbotten "Health care in the county" (Election Authority 1)

petitions whereof 8 were put to a popular vote¹⁴. Thus, even if a referendum was citizen initiated, it had to be government-sponsored. This changed with the constitutional amendment of 2011, which strengthened the citizen initiative so that only if 2/3 of a municipal assembly opposed a citizen initiative would it be denied. This has led to several citizen initiated referendums. However, since this analysis is conducted within the time-frame of 2002-2012 only one referendum (2011 in Ängelholm) was a product of this new policy. Therefore, the legal regulations that have to be taken into account are those of 1994.

The Local Government Act specifies that:

The assembly may decide that, as part of the preparation of a matter to be discussed by the assembly, viewpoints are to be obtained from members of the municipality or county council. This can be done by means of a referendum, an opinion poll or similar procedure. (SFS 1991:900 chap. 5 §34)

The Act lists referendums, opinion polls and the mysterious “similar procedures”¹⁵ as the ways in which local government may let their citizens express their views through popular votes. Since this thesis is focused solely on referendums no data is gathered, and no analysis is conducted regarding “opinion polls and similar procedures”.

A second important aspect is that the referendum is “just” a part of the policy process and as such advisory. As mentioned earlier, Swedish referendums on the local level are never binding. Local government may very well disregard the results of a referendum. The practice, however, has been that the governing party/parties declare that they will abide to the results of the vote, which they almost always have (Wallin, 2007: 124).

What characterises Swedish municipal referendums? An examination of the referendums that are included in this analysis reveals that 9 are topics on changing the name of a municipality and merging/partition of municipalities. The other referendums deal with a broad spectrum of topics, from infrastructure projects to welfare. Another characteristic is that Swedish citizens are less likely to go to the polling stations in local referendums than in the general elections. The average voter turnout in the municipal assembly elections for 2014 was 84,8 % (Election

¹⁴ Unfortunately, none of the two authors give any indication as to which referendums were citizen-initiated.

¹⁵ Although no empirics are gathered on “similar procedures” or opinion polls, one could imagine that such procedures could include electronic voting on minor issues. For an overview of e-democracy in Swedish municipalities see SOU: 1999:12. For an overview of local democracy projects, which can include such opinion polls, see Montin (1998) Some frequency statistics for opinion polls in Swedish municipalities for late 1990’s and early 2000’s is available in (Gilljam et al, 2003: 11)

Authority 2) while the average turnout for the referendums analysed here is 64,6 %¹⁶.

In conclusion, Swedish local governments have held referendums, which were almost exclusively government-initiated, over a long period. With survey-data that has measures for the dependent variable for 11 of these years, and with 63 referendums from comparable political entities, the Swedish case can be used to draw conclusions about government-initiated referendums.

3.2 Survey data

The data used in the analysis is survey material. The surveys that are used here are the annual, national SOM-surveys which measure attitudes regarding society, media and politics. The surveys have been conducted each year from 1986 and are thus a rich source for assessing Swedish trends. In this thesis I am using the SOM Institute Cumulative Dataset (Super-Riks-SOM), which is a pooled dataset including all questions that have been asked at least three times during the years 1986-2012. The cross-sections are conducted yearly and constitute representative samples of the Swedish population.

Respondents are chosen through systematic probability sampling based on the Swedish population and address register (SOM Institute – Codebook, 2014: 5), not all too different from simple random sampling. The sizes of the samples range between 6000 (years 2000-2008) and 12000 (year 2012)¹⁷. Due to the large samples, and by pooling the cross sections, it is possible to make observations on smaller groups. Since Swedish municipalities can be small, the large sample sizes allow for making observations of respondents who live in smaller municipalities which have held referendums.

3.3 Measures

3.3.1 Observing referendums in survey data

Working with survey data and having referendums as the independent variable can be difficult. Since the SOM-surveys do not ask respondents whether they have voted in a referendum, the observation has to be made some other way. I rely on data of where respondents lived and at what time to determine if they have

¹⁶ Highest in Danderyd 2006: 81,6 %. Lowest in Karlstad 2002, 33 %

¹⁷ Year 2000-2008: 6 000, year 2009-2011: 9000, year 2012: 12000 (SOM Institute, 2014: 4)

experienced a referendum or not. If they live in a municipality (identified in the data by municipal codes) that has held a referendum in the previous year, they are measured as having experienced a referendum.

The theoretical discussion was concluded by saying that the “invitation to participate in shaping policy” is what could make citizens regard their representatives and local democracy higher. In other words, this is the mechanism which can explain possible causality between the independent and dependent variable. Since an invitation to participate in the policy process does not have to imply actual voting we can reformulate it to “experiencing a referendum” – as formulated in the hypothesis. Even if a person does not perform the act of voting, s/he is still subject to news coverage, campaigning (although maybe not very extensive, see Wallin, 2007: 177-181) and the implementation of a resulting decision. Although measuring “voting in a referendum” could be a more accepted measure, much like voting in a general election trumps experiencing an election, the measure “experiencing a referendum” works for uncovering changes measured before and after the event of a popular vote. It could be seen as a compromise between using individual-level data, but with aggregate-level measures (cf. Tolbert et al, 2003: 28).

Survey-respondents who have experienced a referendum are in this thesis identified by if they lived in a municipality the year after a referendum was held. E.g. the municipality Örkelljunga holds a referendum in 2003, then the respondents who lives in the municipality the year after are coded as 1=having experienced a referendum. This means that for every year that referendums were held, the subsequent year respondents who live in those municipalities are measured as having experienced the referendums.

Identifying respondents who have experienced a referendum the year after the actual event has three reasons. First, it is unknown when the referendums are held during the year. Neither Kaufmann (2011), Wallin (2007) nor the election authority (Election Authority 1), has any information, which means that we cannot be certain that a respondent has submitted the survey responses after the referendum. Therefore, by measuring a year afterwards we can be certain that the survey was carried out after the referendum. The second aspect is that if experiencing a referendum causes any changes in the perceptions of democracy of citizens, then they should be manifest the year after as well. Lastly, since municipal assemblies later have to decide upon whether the results of the referendum should be followed or not, and since they may change parts of the policy, the actual decision and the subsequent implementation may not take place until later.

This way of observing referendums in survey data could have some drawbacks. We do not know if the respondent actually participated by voting. Distinguishing between voters and non-voters could give empirical evidence to the argument that actual participation is required in order to change perceptions of democracy. Theoretical support of such an argument can be found in Whipple’s (2005) discussion of Dewey’s philosophy of participation. However, we do know

that citizens have experienced the referendum through invitation and possible campaigning. Measuring the year after also means that the municipal assembly most probably has made a decision on the policy that was voted on. Secondly, we cannot ascertain if the respondent lived in the municipality at the year of the referendum. However, since very few move across municipal borders frequently (SCB 1), this uncertainty is manageable.

The lack of measures of voting in sub-national referendums is by some researchers handled by using aggregate data, such as state-level measures in the U.S. (ex. Hill & Leighley 1999). Others rely on cross-sectional data (ex. Bowler & Donovan, 2002). However, since I want to study change in individual-level relationships aggregate data do not give a satisfactory solution. Purely cross-sectional data may work, but it does not capture the importance of change over time when evaluating the effects of an event (a referendum) (Vedung, 2009: 252). Furthermore, a single cross-section could only cover a few referendums while this study includes all referendums held in the period 2002-2011.

The method of observing referendums I use is similar to an empirical analysis of citizen initiatives in American states by Tolbert et al (2003). However, instead of observing referendums as a binary event, they use a continuous scale of “the number of initiatives appearing on the statewide ballot in the each year” (ibid: 28). Also, they do not pool the data from their three surveys due to differences in the survey items.

All 63 Swedish local referendums have been entered in the data set according to the method described above. Among those, the votes held in Stockholm in 2003 and 2006 combined represent 27 (roughly 41%). Data on the referendums was collected from the Swedish election authority (Election Authority 1) and Kaufmann (2011: 258). When combining all these post-referendum observation 1139 respondents were identified as 1=having experienced a referendum (See Appendix A *table A2*).

3.3.2 Operational indicators – perceptions of democracy

Perceptions of democracy were in the theoretical chapter defined as “citizens’ opinions and beliefs of their political environment”. The impact of government-initiated referendums on perceptions of democracy that could be supported by theory was an increased legitimacy of and trust in local government. Trust and legitimacy here serve as indicators of perceptions of democracy.

Perceptions of democracy is measured with three operational indicators:

1. Satisfaction with democracy in respondent’s municipality
2. Confidence in how municipal boards generally handle their jobs
3. Confidence in how the municipal board in respondent’s municipality handles its job (2002-2008)

The question on confidence in how the municipality board works is available for the period 2002-2008, and is thus not included in the analysis of the years 2009-2012.

Indicator (1) Satisfaction with democracy in respondent's municipality was in the surveys formulated as:

On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in: - The municipality where you live (SOM Institute – codebook, 2014:161)

This indicator tells us how citizens perceive the overall democratic governance in their municipality. The wording allows respondents themselves to define the term “democracy” and what standards are satisfactory. The indicator is closely connected to the “perceptions of democracy” concept. While it does not explicitly ask for opinions on trust and legitimacy it does provide an accurate measurement of what citizens think of the overall governance. The questionnaire has four options ranging from “Not at all satisfied” to “very satisfied”, thus disabling the respondent from picking a neutral option.

Indicator (2) Trust in municipality boards:

How much confidence do you have in the way the following institutions and groups do their job? – Municipal boards (SOM Institute - codebook, 2014: 118)

The second indicator measures the dimension of trust and legitimacy. It asks for the opinions on municipal boards in general which means that it is uncertain how much citizens weigh their experiences from their municipality of residence compared to others. The municipal boards include representatives from opposition parties as well as governing parties. How well informed parts of the Swedish population is of this distinction from the national government, which only includes governing parties, is uncertain. The questionnaire has five options from “Very low trust” to “Very high trust” with a neutral option.

Indicator (3) Confidence in how the municipality board works in respondent's municipality:

How do you think the municipal government where you live is doing its job?
(SOM Institute – codebook, 2014: 162)

This indicator is in both wording¹⁸ and meaning almost a duplicate of indicator (2) with the difference that respondents are being asked about their municipality of residence. The answers range from “Very bad” to “Very good” with a neutral option.

¹⁸ The English edition of the code book has separate translations of “kommunstyrelse” – municipal board and municipal government. For some reason the English term is different but the questionnaire was using the same word for both questions. (SOM Institute – codebook, 2014: 162, 118)

The operationalizations are closely connected to the dependent variable perceptions of democracy and reflect the indicators trust and legitimacy of local government which are found in the hypothesis. All three survey items ask respondents about local level politics. Secondly, they are formulated in a way that emphasises trust towards the democratic system, not towards a certain politician (e.g. the mayor) or the ruling majority. This is favourable since the research question asks for perceptions of democracy, not perceptions of the incumbent or current government. A third factor is that both the first and third question asks the respondent about the municipality s/he resides in. Thus, the measures do not have to rely on the assumption that the respondent is first hand thinking of the municipality of residence. In 2008, trust in “one’s own” municipal board is excluded from the analysis. Therefore, with this variable, it is only possible to study the referendums held in the years 2002-2006¹⁹.

None of the three indicators explicitly asks about legitimacy. However, both indicators on trust in municipal boards cover legitimacy. “Confidence in how a municipal board does its job” lets the respondents’ judge the municipal boards’ efforts and achievements on grounds set by the respondents themselves. Since we cannot know how the respondents define the concepts used in the survey questions this becomes an uncertainty we have to cope with – just as in survey methods in general (for a more precise account of measuring legitimacy through surveys see Weatherford, 1992).

Thus, three likert-scale survey items are used as indicators on perceptions of democracy. These were all recoded to dichotomous variables. For the two variables on trust in municipal boards, respondents who picked high trust or very high trust were coded as 1= high trust, and the other as 0=low trust. The coding was identical for the variable on satisfaction with local democracy. The neutral option in the two variables on trust in municipal boards is also coded as 0=low trust since this means that respondents have to actively trust their elected representatives in order to display favourable perceptions of democracy.

The reason for this proceeding is derived from theory. The change between, e.g. very low to low trust in municipal boards after a referendum is not of very high interest when trying to determine whether the local referendum has had an impact on citizens. The step between low trust to high trust, however, more accurately reflects if citizens regard their local government and democracy more positively after a referendum. In the analysis this dichotomy is described as 0=less favourable perceptions of democracy and 1=favourable perceptions of democracy.²⁰

¹⁹ Since “experiencing a referendum” was measured in the year after, and since no local referendums were held in 2007)

²⁰ To see how the three indicators on perceptions of democracy are correlated I refer to Appendix C

3.4 Analysing perceptions of democracy

Respondents who have experienced referendums were identified as those who live in a municipality the year after a referendum was held. To measure effects these respondents have to be compared to another category. This can either be done by comparing to the same population (citizens of the municipalities that have held referendums) but at an earlier point of time, or by standard cross-sectional analysis where the group of comparison is respondents living in municipalities without referendums (Vedung, 2009: 250-255). The approach chosen here is the former. With access to repeated surveys it is possible to observe change over time in perceptions of democracy, but within the same geographical units. Since the questions in the SOM surveys are identical from year to year this also facilitates pooling of the data without having to worry about differing measures (cf. Firebaugh, 1997: 14).

The observation before a referendum is made on the same logic as the observation after: Since it is unknown when respondents experience a referendum or answer their questionnaires in the year of a referendum, the observation is made the year before. Thus, those who have not experienced a referendum are identified as those who live in the same municipalities as those who have, but two years before. This could be described as a simple pretest-posttest design (cf. Mark et al, 2000: 265-267). We have t_{-1} (pre-referendum observation), t (referendum) and t_{+1} (post-referendum observation), where the perceptions of democracy are studied as changing over time. I am therefore treating “experienced referendums” as a binary event. It could also be described as having experienced a referendum (t_{+1}), or being about to experience a referendum (t_{-1}), and at both points in time perceptions of democracy is measured. This could also be compared to an interrupted time-series design, although with the difference that I here only cover one measure before and one after (cf. Vedung, 2009: 243). Thus, the quantitative empirics are used to study change over time, which gives evidence on the effects of the event (the referendum) which occurs between the two observations (ibid).

When employing this sort of method, a problem is the post hoc fallacy²¹. If we imagine that respondents have more favourable perceptions in the post-referendum observations, this does not directly imply causation with the local referendum held in the year before. However, with the repeated survey material it is possible to control for both individual level factors, such as education and income, and factors specific for studying social change, such as period-effects, other events or population overturn (Firebaugh, 1997). Period-effects are general trends, e.g. during economic recession when unemployment is higher, it is plausible that citizens are not as trusting of politicians. Other events, exogenous or

21 Post hoc ergo propter hoc – “after this, therefore because of this”.

endogenous, that may affect how citizens perceive local democracy could for example include general elections or political scandals. Population overturn, or cohort-effects, is simply that with time, the population changes; when comparing teenage respondents in 2002 with the same category in 2012, it is not the same pool of respondents. In fact, Ryder (1965: 859-861) argues that since cohort effects and period effects complement each other, aggregate social change far outpaces individual change. If this study would use pooled data for a longer period, say 20 years, these factors would require more consideration. However, with fewer years the population turnover is not quite as severe (cf. Firebaugh, 1997: 45). If needed, the survey data could be used to control for such effects (for one such analysis see Abramson & Aldrich, 1982).

In the initial descriptive statistics, which compares perceptions of democracy in the pre-referendum observation and the post-referendum observation, respondents are pooled together based on which year a referendum was held. For example, respondents in the survey of 2003 who lived in municipalities that held referendums in 2004 are coded as 0=about to experience a referendum, while respondents in the survey of 2005 who live in the same municipalities are coded as 1=having experienced a referendum. While this does not pool respondents over time, it pools them over municipal borders. In the later logistic regression analysis all these pre-referendum respondents were pooled together as 0, and all post-referendum respondents as 1, pooling them over the full cumulative data set from 2002-2012. Since the SOM-surveys do not oversample certain groups, this approach creates two observations of perceptions of democracy for all local referendums, based on representative samples of the national population in the period 2002-2012. For the referendums of 2002, the before-observation is made in 2002. The reason for this is that the three indicators on perceptions of democracy were not available in 2001.

Altogether, 1055 respondents across all years were identified as about to experience a referendum, and 1139 as having experienced a referendum (See Appendix A2 table A2 for assessment of individual years).

Throughout the statistical analyses I use odds and odds ratios for presenting the results. This is natural due to the fact that both independent and dependent variables have binary outcomes. Reporting odds in the descriptive statistics may not be necessary, but it facilitates comparisons with the later logistic regression.

4 Results

In this section it is tested whether local referendums lead to changes in citizens' perceptions of democracy. With the government-initiative hypothesis²², it is expected that an increase in favourable perceptions of democracy should occur.

In the first part of the empirical examination I present a comparison between the pre-referendum observation and the post-referendum observation to determine if respondents who have experienced a referendum to a higher extent display favourable perceptions of democracy. This is done by pooling respondents together based on the year of referendums. In the second section the effects of referendums are further investigated with logistic regression to verify whether the relationship is statistically significant, and in order to enter control variables. For the regression, all pre-referendum observations are pooled together, and so are the post-referendum observations.

4.1 Descriptive analysis

A first empirical examination of how referendums affect citizens' perceptions of democracy is presented in comparisons of average odds. These are average odds of having favourable perceptions of democracy (e.g. the odds of being satisfied, rather than dissatisfied, with local democracy). For this analysis the referendums were grouped by year (e.g. respondents who live in municipalities that held referendums in 2003 are grouped together as "having experienced a referendum in 2003"). The category of comparison is respondents from the same municipalities but from the year before the referendum.

The odds (where $\text{odds} = p/(1-p)$) are calculated from percentages in the three dependent variables in the year before and the year after a group of referendums independently of each other. The mean of these odds are presented in table 4.1.1²³.

²² Citizens who experience local referendums will grant their local government increased trust and legitimacy.

²³ Finding differences in perceptions of democracy before and after a referendum with use of odds also facilitate comparison with the later logistic regression. However, these are for comparisons only, since the average odds presented here are not the basis for the logits and odds ratios in the regression model.

Table 4.1.1 Differences in average odds between the year before and year after for referendums grouped by year.

	Satisfaction with local democracy	Trust in municipal boards generally	Trust in respondents municipal board†
	Average odds (n)	Average odds (n)	Average odds (n)
Pre-referendum	1,4226	0,3107	0,3618
One year before	(839)	(994)	(396)
Post-referendum	2,2411	0,3409	0,5347
One year after	(1092)	(1074)	(632)
Ratios	1,5754	1,0972	1,4779

Comment: “Odds” are here defined as $p/(1-p)$. The figures reported here are the mean values of the odds for every group of year & referendum. For comparison to the original odds and percentages they were calculated from see Appendix B *table B1*. The ratios are obtained by dividing odds the year after with the comparing group of the year before. Here they serve as measures of change between the two points of observation.

†Trust in respondents municipal board is only available for 2002-2008. Since no referendums were held in 2007, the last referendums to be reported in these scores are those of 2006 (measured *before=2005* and *after=2007*)

Although “average odds” may not be a standard unit of measurement, they here provide comparable estimates of how likely it is that respondents have favourable perceptions of democracy in a single score for every observation.

From the results we can see that being satisfied with local democracy is the only indicator that shows that respondents are generally more satisfied than dissatisfied (average odds over 1) in observations both before and after. A possible explanation is the lack of a neutral option in the survey item, making respondents actively choose if they favour the local democracy or not. The two variables on how respondents regard municipal boards show lower average odds, all below 1. Furthermore, respondents seem to regard the work of their own municipal board higher (with the average odds of 0,3618 and 0,5347) than the work of municipal boards generally (0,3107 and 0,3409). More interestingly for the question asked in this paper, the results indicate an increase in the average odds between the year before and year after a referendum across all dependent variables. Respondents have more favourable perceptions of democracy in the year following a referendum than in the year before. The ratios reported in the table show the difference between the observations before and after, and serve as indicators of how large the change is. For the variable “trust in municipal boards

generally” the change between the average odds is the ratio of 1,0972. In other words, if the average odds of the year before (0,3107) is multiplied by ratio (1,0972) we get the average odds of the year after measurement (0,3409).²⁴

This initial examination of the data shows that respondents who live in municipalities that have held referendums are more likely to regard their local democracy and representatives higher – an increase in favourable perceptions of democracy. The results speak in favour of government-initiative hypothesis. Indeed, if we regard this change over time as a direct measure of the impact of the local referendums, they could be deemed as successful in “strengthening the positions of elected and parties” (Wallin, 2007: 82). However, the ratios reported above does not tell us whether the change is significant. Furthermore, it is unknown whether this change actually depends on the referendums held in the years between observations or if other factors are the sources of change, such as period-effects or other events (cf. Firebaugh, 1997). Thus, although the descriptive statistics point to positive effects of referendums, not to far-reaching conclusions should be drawn from the analysis.

4.2 Logistic regression

Statistics that show differences between measurements the year before and the year after a referendum were produced as average odds in the previous section. The descriptive results showed that respondents seem to have higher perceptions of democracy in the year after a referendum than in the year before. In this section, it is tested whether this increase over time is statistically significant with regression analysis. Since the indicators are dichotomous, logistic regression is used²⁵.

In the previous analysis the respondents were grouped together by the year the referendums were held, and the average odds were the mean of the odds to have favourable perceptions of democracy in the years before and after referendums. A similar approach is taken in the regression analysis, but instead of measuring the perceptions of democracy on the basis of the year of referendums and then obtaining an average, all observations before and after were pooled together. The respondents who lived in a municipality in the year after a referendum was held were all pooled together as 1=having experienced a referendum. Respondents

²⁴ Yet again the simple rule that values over 1 indicates an increase applies.

²⁵ As noted in the methodology chapter: Another approach would be to keep them as 5 or 4-scale likert items and run an ordinal regression. However, the point of interest for this thesis is to see whether referendums (change over time) make citizens move from distrusting to trusting or from dissatisfied to satisfied, not the steps between, say very dissatisfied to dissatisfied. The logits produced in a logistic regression therefore produce a closer result compared to what the theoretical discussion expects.

Table 4.2.1 Changes in perceptions of democracy between the year before and after referendums, binary logistic regression.

	Trust in respondents municipal board†			Trust in municipal boards generally		
	β	Odds ratio	S.E	β	Odds ratio	S:E.
Year after (0-1)	,108	1,114	,131	,206	1,229	,115
Constant	-,612**	,524	,102	-1,543**	,214	,085
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	,001			,003		
n	1053			1978		

<i>Table 4.2.1 continued</i>	Satisfaction with local democracy 1			Satisfaction with local democracy 2		
	β	Odds ratio	S.E.	β	Odds ratio	S.E.
Year after (0-1)	,297*	1,346	,095	,607	1,835	,337
Political interest				,048	1,049	,090
Political interest × Year after (0-1)				-,123	,884	,121
Constant	,210*	1,234	,071	,090	1,094	,129
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	,007			,007		
n	1856			1838		

Comment: The table displays logits (β) Odds ratios (antilog) and standard error. The reference group are the respondents in the year before a referendum. All variables in the analyses are dichotomous.

The “Political interest” variable reports coefficient and odds ratio for respondents of the year before while the “Political interest×Year after” reports for political interest in the year after a referendum in reference to the year before.

† Trust in respondents municipal board is only available for 2002-2008.

* indicates significance at $p < .05$. ** Indicates significance at $p < .01$

from the same municipalities but in the year before the referendum were coded as 0=not having experienced a referendum. In the analysis this dummy variable is

named “year after”. Thus, respondents of municipalities without referendums are excluded from the analyses, while those of the year before constitute the reference group.

The results of the binary logistic regressions are presented in table 4.2.1. The original models are bivariate, where the measure is what effect time has on the dependent variable. Those who lived in municipalities prior to referendums were throughout the analyses used as reference groups. The coefficients therefore indicate the change in the odds to have favourable perceptions of democracy from this category to those who live in the same municipalities two years after (for a more detailed review of a similar model see Firebaugh, 1997: 42-63).

A first comment on the results is that all coefficients are positive. Like the previous analysis, these regressions indicate that respondents who live in municipalities during the year after a referendum regard their local democracy and representatives higher. However, this change is only statistically significant with the dependent variable “satisfaction with local democracy”. Thus, the increase in odds we saw in the earlier analysis for trust in both respondents’ own municipal boards and municipal boards generally is not supported here.

With the logit 0,297, and the odds ratio 1,346, a positive change between the two observations of satisfaction with local democracy can be seen. Although the odds ratios in table 4.1.1 do not add up to those reported here, because of the different ways of pooling the data, it is clear that an increase of 1,346 seems plausible when comparing to the earlier statistics. If this gross effect (only measuring change over time) is interpreted as the impact of the local referendums this has implications for my theoretical argument of government-initiated referendums. Closing the gap between citizens and representatives was one of the main reasons for Swedish municipalities to make use of government-initiated referendums, and the reason for focusing the government-initiative hypothesis on legitimacy and trust. If government-initiated referendums only make citizens regard their local democracy overall higher, that implies representative do not gain anything by initiating referendums²⁶.

In order to assess whether this increase in satisfaction is robust, a second model includes political interest as a control variable. How interested you are in politics in general has a well documented effect on political participation as well as knowledge of the democratic system (cf. Esaiasson et al, 2011). In this model political interest is coded as a dummy variable²⁷. Political interest was also included as an interaction term (Political interest×Year after), which allows a change between the year before and the year after. Since the reference category is

²⁶ With exception for possible short term goals which are unrelated to perceptions of democracy (cf. Morel, 2001; cf Rahat, 2009: 102).

²⁷ The coding followed the same procedure as for the dependent variables. Very little interest to little interest in politics is coded as 0=not interested in politics, and interested to very interested as 1=interested in politics.

still the respondents of “the year before”, this becomes necessary²⁸. Firebaugh (1997: 46-47) refers to a model constructed on similar grounds as a “changing-parameter model”.

When controlling for interest in politics the year after-coefficient is no longer statistically significant, and neither are the variables on political interest nor the constant. Thus, the local referendums of Sweden do not contribute to any change in perceptions of democracy within the municipalities.

It could be argued that the positive effects of the government-initiated referendums would only occur if the participation is high enough. High voter turnout indicates that citizens bother enough to go to the polling stations and can thus serve as an indicator on the importance of an issue. However, when running duplicates of the logistic regressions reported in table 4.2.1, but only including referendums with high turnout (here defined as >65 %)²⁹, that produces an almost identical result (see Appendix B *table B1*). Even when under good circumstances, with high voter turnout, the changes in citizens’ perceptions of democracy between the two years were not significant.

When compared to results from research with similar methods but focused on citizen-initiatives in the U.S. (Tolbert et al, 2003; Bowler & Donovan, 2004), the results I report above are contradictory to their findings. Although they have different measures on perceptions of democracy, since they rely on direct democratic theory, a methodological difference is that they do not pool their repeated surveys but use them for purely cross-sectional analyses. It is possible that the reason for the absence of significant results in the logistic regression is not that government-initiated local referendums do not produce positive outcomes, but just that they cannot be observed when having the reference group as respondents from the same municipalities but two years before. To construct an analysis comparable to Tolbert et al (2003), and Bowler and Donovan’s studies, the surveys would have to be pooled together and treated as single cross-sections. I therefore pooled the surveys of 2003-2005, 2006-2009³⁰ and 2010-2012 (thus comprising the periods between general elections) and obtained correlation coefficients (tau-b). These coefficients measure bivariate correlations between experiencing a referendum (post-referendum observation) and the indicators on perceptions of democracy. Since the analyses were cross-sectional the group coded as 0=not having experienced a referendum comprised respondents of other municipalities in the same year. Like earlier analyses, this test did not produce any statistically significant results. These statistics are reported in Appendix C. Thus,

²⁸ The “Political interest” variable reports coefficient and odds ratio for respondents of the year before while the “Political interest×Year after” is for political interest in the year after a referendum in reference to the year before.

²⁹ The reason for defining high voter turnout as over 65 % is to have enough observations in the analyses which are not only confined to the referendums of the Stockholm municipalities (which had generally higher turnout).

³⁰ With the exception of 2008, since no referendums took place in 2007

running analyses based on the same methods as previous research did not produce any significant correlations between the government-initiated referendums and citizens' perceptions of democracy. Running further detailed analyses with other mediating variables or by setting the data up differently does not seem motivated.

In conclusion, while the average odds for having favourable perceptions of democracy were higher in the year after a referendum, the regression analysis showed that this increase in favourable perceptions of democracy between the pre-referendum observation and the post-referendum observation were not significant. The exception was for satisfaction with local democracy. However, when controlling for political interest among the respondents, the change over time was no longer significant. Neither by modifying the analysis to fit better conditions (high turnout), nor by running purely cross-sectional analyses, produced any significant impact of the government-initiated referendums. The government-initiative hypothesis thus has to be rejected.

5 Discussion

The first conclusion that can be drawn from the empirical test is that government-initiated local referendums do not affect citizens' perceptions of democracy. With no significant results, the government-initiative hypothesis thus needs to be rejected.

With the empirical evidence telling us that the local referendums in Sweden do not have any impact on how citizens perceive their local democracy, we may still find the explanation in the theoretical arguments. Therefore, this extension of the analysis will be focused on two arguments in the theoretical section. The first is the relationship between citizens and representatives in a representative democracy model which includes referendums. This is one of the central aspects of both the theoretical section and the measures that were used. Following the controversies between representative and direct democracy regarding *who* should make decisions (elected elites or citizens themselves), it was suggested that although representatives still want to enjoy their elevated position, citizens could be brought into a policy process through advisory voting. Such a strategy was thought to fix the problem of low participation and close the gap between elected and the electorate, but without implications that could disrupt the power of representatives.

The second conclusion we can draw from the lack of confirming empirics is that if the theory on government-initiated referendums that is presented in this thesis is incorrect, that has consequences for hypotheses with higher demands on how referendums are thought to affect citizens. If bringing citizens into local decision making through local referendums in Sweden does not impact their opinions on representatives and local democracy, then how can the civic education-hypothesis or the referendum democracy concept for that matter, be viable in studying the same referendums? Although they might rest on different causal mechanisms or are conditional upon certain institutions, I will argue that these theories might need to be redefined as well.

5.1 Representatives and citizens

In the theoretical section it was argued that the referendum institute was introduced on the local level in Sweden in order to bridge an increasing gap between elected politicians and citizens. A comparative anthology (Schiller, 2011) on the topic revealed that similar reasons could be found in other European

countries. By holding referendums citizens could be brought into decision making by popular votes. However, by reducing the actual directness of the referendums (non-binding decisions, government initiation) the representatives could still remain in a favourable position of power. Still, the popular votes represent a foreign element in a policy process. The interaction between elected elites and citizens would therefore change accordingly to these new circumstances under which decisions were made. These expectations were in this theory developed from the academic literature on, mostly national, referendums, but also corresponds with the aims of Swedish policy (SOU 2000:1). A review of the literature on reasons for including a referendum device in national legislation revealed that the reasons were somewhat similar in other European countries. For example, Garkäjs (2011) notes that the Lithuanian policy on local referendums has the same focus on “complementing the representative government” that Sweden has had. Thus, giving local governments the possibility of holding referendums presents an opportunity of involvement of citizens in the political process, without imposing constraints on the authority of representatives. Since the positive effects on citizens that referendum democratic and direct democratic theory argued for relies on that citizens are the main actors in a referendum, we should expect less from government-initiated local referendums. If any, the effects would occur as specified by the reasoning for implementing them – to strengthen representative democracy and closing the gap between citizens and elected politicians.

With the results from the survey data presented earlier the impact referendums may have on citizens is therefore questionable. Local governments giving citizens the possibility to influence a decision (of the government’s choice) through a vote (which is only advisory) does not seem to satisfy the demands of the theory. The self-government of citizens was either not experienced, or if citizens did experience it, it did not mean anything for the trust in their representatives. Government-initiated local referendums do not seem to have any impact that could bridge the gap between representatives and represented. Even if citizens appreciate the opportunity to influence policy, it did not produce any significant changes in perceptions of democracy between the pre-referendum observations and the post-referendum observations. Letting citizens influence a decision is not enough to ensure changes in perceptions of democracy. If the referendum institute is made available for local governments in order to increase the legitimacy of the representative democracy model then it is a device that has failed in achieving that goal.

Although not an instrumental part of the theoretical argument, it could be argued that the local referendums of Sweden fail to produce any changes in citizens’ perceptions of democracy due to the fact that they are of low interest – voting on renaming your municipality may not have the same effect as when, for example, American states vote on the use of cannabis. However, when duplicating the regression but including only referendums with high voter turnout, this did not change the results. Thus, we can also conclude that low interest in the issues or policies voted on is not what explains the lack of positive effects. The absence of

positive effects remained also when switching the group of comparison from the same municipalities in an earlier year to pure cross-sectional control. This rejects the notion that the effects could be noticeable in comparison with other municipalities.

Another observation is that we beforehand know that the perceptions of democracy in Sweden are fairly good – a majority of the Swedish citizens in fact perceive their local democracy to be good (SOM-institute, 2013: 40) and a fairly large number support their local government (ibid: 40). One might therefore question the relevance of including referendums in the decision making apparatus if the objective, at least in part, is to create an inflow of legitimacy and trust to the representative system. This could be compared to the results in Gilljam and Jodal's (2006) study of local democracy projects, such as youth- and elderly councils. They deemed these projects as inadequate in vitalizing local politics and changing citizens' attitudes towards local politics and democracy (ibid: 225-226). The projects were characterised by half-measure attempts and as such did not give any effects. In fact, they use the same measures as I am, but with fewer observations and a somewhat differing use of interaction-effects and panel data to study latent predictors of political participation and trust (ibid: 219, 223). In a blog-post on a Swedish political science blog Erlingsson further questioned the relevance of these local democracy projects by discussing if they were needed at all. Because of the already high support of local government his answer was "why fix something that is not broken?" (Politologerna 1).

Both the local democracy projects discussed above and the local referendums analysed in this thesis aim at strengthening the representative democracy. While every governing party or politician may have other objectives (cf. De Vreese, 2006; Breuer, 2009: 29-32) with a single referendum, the principal aim of making them available to local governments is complementing the representative system. And although referendums are special when compared to other democracy projects, the argument can apply to the Swedish usage of local referendums as well; an attempt at fixing something that is not broken.

5.1.1 Who's idea to vote?

One of the key characteristics of the Swedish municipalities' use of local referendums is that they are government initiated. This was also one of the reasons for studying the Swedish use of local referendums as a case. As stated in the theory section, this puts the relation between citizens and representatives as a priority. Previous empirical research (Morel, 2001, Rahat, 2009) tells us that the question of who is initiating a referendum often is more important than other variables (such as voter turnout or question wording) in explaining the effects of a referendum. This was also one of the reasons for analysing the effects of referendums with a modified version of referendum democracy. By tuning down the power of citizens and emphasising that referendums are used on terms set by

elites, it was believed that the desired outcomes of referendums should be in the elites favour. However, by taking the directness out of referendums, there is the possibility that referendums lose their purpose (that citizens decide upon policy) and thus also lose desired effects (such as trust in the representatives who initiated the referendum). While the theoretical argument presented in this thesis was formulated to account for this lack of directness, it seems that even a toned down version in favour of strengthening representative democracy was too optimistic.

If citizens feel that through voting in a referendum they only partake in an expensive opinion poll, without being that influential, and if citizens already are satisfied with their local democracy and their representatives, then it is not strange that the results are absent of any positive effects. In a study similar to this thesis, Bowler & Donovan (2002) found that citizen attitudes towards state-level government in the U.S. were more favourable when referendums had been used. While government-initiated also gave effects, they show that citizen-initiated referendums had more impact on changes in citizen attitudes. Following their findings, the American case resembles the referendum democracy concept, whereas the Swedish case takes one step further away from the direct democratic elements of referendums, leaving citizens without the essential influence. In fact, the amount of control that elites exercise over citizens in the process of holding a referendum may be the weak link in the theory³¹. The *invitation to participate* simply is not enough to stimulate changing perceptions of democracy over time.

This resembles Verba and Norman's (1972) research on political participation, where instead of looking for quantity of participation, we should emphasise the quality of participation. Just putting "democracy tools" to use does not imply qualitative participation and ensuing positive effects on how citizens perceive government. It is conceivable that in order to close the gap between citizens and representatives, and to fix a participatory deficit, referendums are an accessible tool that is attributed with great effects on citizens. However, in taking the directness out of the referendum process (see figure 2.3.1) government-initiated referendums rob the direct democratic referendum of its causal mechanism: Through collective self-government that bypasses elites, citizens gain civic virtues and education such as increased political knowledge, tolerance and respect. By formulating my theoretical argument to instead be in favour of the elites, who initiates and decides upon the results of the referendums, I lessened the expectations on the Swedish local referendums. Still, with the results not being able to reject the null, nor confirm the argument on "invitation to participate in shaping policy" that I proposed, it is hard to argue in favour of the positive effects of government-initiated referendums.

³¹ With the argument I presented in the theory section: By invitation from politicians, citizens would feel that they are listened to and are an active part in shaping policy, which would lead to more favourable perceptions of local democracy.

5.2 Referendums and direct democracy

With the argument presented in this paper being incorrect, that has implications for other expectations on referendums. A recurring argument I have made in favour of the theory used here is that the expectations of the effects of referendums were modest in comparison to more optimistic views of what the use of referendums could mean. Here I would argue that if the local referendums of Sweden do not give any discernible effects on trust and legitimacy, then how could other theories of the effects of referendums, even when tested on government-initiated referendums in a more “hospitable environment³²”, be valid?

When comparing to the direct democratic society envisaged by Barber (2003) and Pateman (1970), with its popular self-government, the government-initiated local referendums of Sweden seem very far away. Having this in mind, we could look to the referendum democracy concept which was frequently discussed in the theory section. Mendelsohn and Parkin (2001) argued that as referendums have become an integrated part of representative government they have had an impact on the institutions of liberal democracy, including citizens (ibid). This was thought to increase the responsiveness of representatives and result in citizen empowerment. Also this empowerment of citizens was dismissed as being too far removed from the government-initiated referendums, due to the amount of control elites can exercise in framing the question put on the ballot.

When the results in this thesis then deem the government-initiative hypothesis as incorrect, the expectations set by the referendum democratic and direct democratic theory with regards to citizens, also fail. The argument here is simple. If government-initiated local referendums do not produce an increase in favourable perceptions of democracy, they can hardly produce any greater outcomes – especially since self-government and empowerment of citizens rely on bypassing elites. Since the hypothesis presented in this thesis was adapted to the specifics of government-initiated referendums and was more modest in its expectations, then neither direct democratic nor referendum democratic theory can be more successful in predicting changes in perceptions of democracy.

³² Such as a polity with frequent use of government-initiated referendum, or with access to more direct democratic referendums (such as citizen initiatives or mandatory constitutional referendums).

5.3 Concluding remarks

The theoretical discussion in this thesis started with the observation that referendums often are envisaged as efforts in civic education, and ended with the rejection of a more modest hypothesis, which expected that citizens might display more favourable perceptions of democracy after experiencing a government-initiated referendum. Although this attempt at conceptualising referendums in representative democracy did not succeed, future research needs to continue producing theory and testable hypotheses beyond the ideal types of direct democracy and representative democracy. Especially a continued effort to empirically study government-initiated referendums is needed to assess the theoretical claims made by several different democracy traditions.

Swedish national government strengthened the citizen-initiative in 2010. When local governments could no longer block petitions to the extent they have done before, several citizen-initiatives were successful in being put on the ballot. However, since the votes are still advisory, this has led to that local government more often disregards the results of such votes. Studying Swedish local referendums in the future promises to be as intriguing as the years 2002-2011 were.

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7 Appendix

7.1 Appendix A – referendums and frequencies

Table A1: Local referendums included in the analyses

Year	Municipality	Topic	Yes %	No %	Turnout %
2011	Ängelholm	New traffic route	-	-	-
2010	Kinda	Sale of Villa Björksund	-	-	-
2010	Lidköping	Placement of the city library	-	-	-
2009	Avesta	Placement of train station	-	-	-
2009	Borgholm	Öland – one municipality	-	-	-
2009	Mörbylånga	Öland- one municipality	-	-	-
2008	Vilhelmina	Hydropower line	46	52	74,5
2008	Huddinge	Partition of municipality	40	58,8	52,6
2006	Österåker	Congestion charges	40,9	59,1	74,9
2006	Vaxholm	Congestion charges	45,9	54,1	80,2
2006	Täby	Congestion charges	34,2	65,8	78,6
2006	Tyresö	Congestion charges	44,3	55,7	77,7
2006	Stockholm	Congestion charges	53	47	76,4
2006	Solna	Congestion charges	43,9	56,1	74
2006	Sollentuna	Congestion charges	40,8	59,2	72,7
2006	Salem	Congestion charges	39,6	60,4	76

Table A1 continued

2006	Nynäshamn	Congestion charges	41,2	58,8	78,7
2006	Nacka	Congestion charges	42,9	57,1	78,1
2006	Lidingö	Congestion charges	29,6	70,4	78,7
2006	Haninge	Congestion charges	40,8	59,2	69
2006	Ekerö	Congestion charges	32,5	67,5	81,6
2006	Danderyd	Congestion charges	32,5	67,5	81,6
2006	Älvdalen	Hunting of wolf	87,7	12,3	65,6
2006	Rättvik	Hunting of wolf	72,7	27,3	62,8
2006	Orsa	Hunting of wolf	81,7	18,3	68,1
2006	Mora	Hunting of wolf	77,3	22,7	60,4
2006	Härnösand	New shopping centre	43,5	56,5	60
2006	Gällivare	Car-free town centre	50,4	49,6	66
2006	Eskilstuna	Partition of municipality	21,7	78,3	53
2005	Öckerö	Ferry or bridge	34	65	55
2005	Kalix	New school plan	11	89	34
2004	Kungälv	Keeping music school	77	21	45,5
2004	Värmdö	Project for young people	78	22	37,6
2004	Värmdö	Congestion charges	22	78	37,7
2004	Partille	New road	39	61	44
2004	Norrköping	Keeping emergency hospital	96	4	49
2004	Bräcke	Merging of Bräcke and Ragunda	35	64,5	43,5
2004	Ragunda	Merging of Bräcke and Ragunda	19,5	77,5	48,5

Table A1 continued

2003	Norsjö	Water protection project	31	69	65
2003	Södertälje	New bridge over "Maren"	40,4	55,7	67,2
2003	Örkelljunga	Fees in child care	61,1	25,8	57,4
2003	Österåker	Congestion charges	14,3	82,1	73,4
2003	Vaxholm	Congestion charges	19,4	76	72,8
2003	Täby	Congestion charges	14,5	82,1	78,2
2003	Tyresö	Congestion charges	14,7	81,8	75,6
2003	Sollentuna	Congestion charges	16,1	79,5	73,2
2003	Solna	Congestion charges	19	77,1	68
2003	Salem	Congestion charges	13,6	83,4	73,5
2003	Nykvarn	Congestion charges	12,9	81,4	76,8
2003	Nacka	Congestion charges	16,3	80,9	73
2003	Lidingö	Congestion charges	7,8	90,4	77,6
2003	Ekerö	Congestion charges	16,3	79,8	78,7
2003	Danderyd	Congestion charges	15,7	81	72,9
2003	Luleå	Local road use	Only buses 24,8	Cars & buses 68,4	46,1
2002	Uppvidinge	Child care project	51,6	39,9	51,4
2002	Skurup	Off-shore wind farm	49	51	-
2002	Orust	New connection to mainland	Bridge 33,9	Tunnel 34,6	42,7
2002	Ljusnarsberg	New name	<50	>50	-
2002	Karlstad	Child care project	68,2	22,5	33
2002	Håbo	New name	27,7	69,7	68,6

Table A1 continued

2002	Haparanda	Urban planning project	46,2	52,3	52
2002	Haninge	Public housing	52,9	47,1	60,5
2002	Essunga	New name	51,4	47,6	75,8

Notes: Results, voter turnout and English translation for the years 2002-2008 is collected from Kaufmann (2011: 265-267). Average turnout 64,649 %. Topics are from Kaufmann (ibid) the Election Authority (Election Authority 1).

Table A2: Frequencies of respondents identified in pre-referendum and post-referendum observations

Year	Year before a referendum	Year after a referendum
2002	323	-
2003	84	92
2004	8	260
2005	538	98
2006	-	12
2007	30	536
2008	16	-
2009	44	49
2010	12	35
2011	-	26
2012	-	31
Total	1055	1139

7.2 Appendix B – Odds and regression

Table B1: Percentages and odds for having favourable perceptions of democracy for respondents grouped by year of referendum.

Satisfaction with local democracy					
One year before a referendum			One year after a referendum		
Year	Percentage (n)	Odds	Year	Percentage (n)	Odds
2002	56,3 (160)	1,2883	2003	53,5 (86)	1,1505
			2004	53,4 (247)	1,1459
2003	46,9 (81)	0,8832	2005	47,9 (94)	0,9194
2004	57,1 (7)	1,331	2006	75 (12)	3
2005	55,6 (513)	1,2523	2007	68,3 (517)	2,1546
2006	-	-	2008	-	-
2007	63,3 (30)	1,7248	2009	68,8 (48)	2,2051
2008	60 (15)	1,5	2010	85,3 (34)	5,8027
2009	66,7 (21)	2,003	2011	69,2 (26)	2,2468
2010	58,3 (12)	1,3981	2012	60,7 (28)	1,5445
	(839)	Mean 1,4226		(1092)	Mean 2,2411

Table B1 continued

Trust in respondents municipal board

One year before a referendum			One year after a referendum		
Year	Percentage (n)	Odds	Year	Percentage (n)	Odds
2002	40,1 (142)	0,6694	2003	41,5 (41)	0,7094
2003	22,2 (36)	0,2853	2004	38,1 (113)	0,6155
2004	0 (3)	0	2005	32,7 (52)	0,4859
2005	33 (215)	0,4925	2006	20 (5)	0,25
	(396)	Mean 0,3618	2007	38 (421)	0,6129
				(632)	Mean 0,5347

Trust in municipal boards generally

One year before a referendum			One year after a referendum		
Year	Percentage (n)	Odds	Year	Percentage (n)	Odds
2002	21 (309)	0,2658	2003	27,1 (85)	0,3717
2003	13,4 (82)	0,1547	2004	19,4 (248)	0,2407
2004	0 (6)	0	2005	20,2 (94)	0,2531
2005	15,6 (507)	0,1848	2006	45,5 (11)	0,8349
			2007	19,3 (512)	0,2392

Table B1 continued

2006	-	-	2008	-	-
2007	34,5 (29)	0,5267	2009	14,3 (35)	0,1669
2008	13,3 (15)	0,1534	2010	38,2 (34)	0,6181
2009	41,2 (34)	0,7007	2011	16 (25)	0,1905
2010	33,3 (12)	0,4993	2012	13,3 (30)	0,1534
(994)	Mean 0,3107		(1074)	Mean 0,3409	

Notes: Table displays percentages of respondents who have favourable perceptions of democracy, and the odds for having favourable perceptions of democracy. The mean values are also reported in table 4.1.1

Table B2: Logistic regression including only referendums with high turnout

	Trust in respondents municipal board†			Trust in municipal boards generally		
	β	Odds ratio	S.E	β	Odds ratio	S:E.
Year after dummy	,127	1,135	,153	,255	1,190	,139
Constant	- ,551**	,576	,122	-1,629	,196	,103
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	,001			,004		
n	773			1391		

<i>Table B2</i> <i>continued</i>	Satisfaction with local democracy 1			Satisfaction with local democracy 2		
	β	Odds ratio	S.E.	β	Odds ratio	S.E.
Year after dummy	,301*	1,351	,115	,717	2,049	,417
Political interest				,074	1,077	,105
Political interest \times Year after dummy				-,162	,851	,146
Constant	,232*	1,261	,084	,045	1,046	,297
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	,007			,007		
n	1283			1269		

7.3 Appendix C - Cross-sectional analysis

Correlation matrices displaying cross-sectional correlation coefficients between those who experienced a referendum and the dependent variables are presented below. This (non-parametric) correlation coefficient displays a result ranging from -1 to 1. The Tau coefficient measures if paired observations vary together. Experiencing referendums is not significantly correlated with any of the indicators on perceptions of democracy. This result does not change between the different pooled cross-sections.

Table C1: Cross-sectional analyses of the effects of referendums. Years 2003, 2004, 2005 – Correlation matrix. Kendall’s tau-b. (n in parentheses)

	Experienced a referendum	Trust in respondents municipal board	Trust in municipal boards generally	Satisfaction with local democracy
Experienced a referendum	1			
Trust in respondents’ municipal board	,027 (4492)	1		
Trust in municipal boards generally	,016 (10185)	,418** (4336)	1	
Satisfaction with local democracy	-,002 (10235)	,223** (4331)	,217** (9958)	1

Notes:

** indicates significance at $p < ,001$

Table C2: Cross-sectional analyses of the effects of referendums. Years 2006, 2007, 2009 – Correlation matrix. Kendall’s tau-b. (n in parentheses)

	Experienced a referendum	Trust in municipal boards generally	Satisfaction with local democracy
Experienced a referendum	1		
Trust in municipal boards generally	-,016 (9548)	1	
Satisfaction with local democracy	,025 (11205)	,210** (9364)	1

Notes: Trust in respondents’ municipal board is reported in table B3 since it is not measured after 2008.

** indicates significance at $p < ,001$

Table C3: Cross-sectional analysis of the effects of referendums. Years 2006, 2007 – Correlation matrix. Kendall’s tau-b. (n in parentheses)

	Experienced a referendum	Trust in respondents’ municipal board
Experienced a referendum	1	
Trust in respondents’ municipal board	-,011 (4206)	1

Notes: Since trust in respondents’ municipal board is not available for the year 2009 it is here reported by itself.

** indicates significance at $p < .001$

Table C4: Cross-sectional analyses of the effects of referendums. Years 2010, 2011, 2012 – Correlation matrix. Kendall’s tau-b. (n in parentheses)

	Experienced a referendum	Trust in municipal boards generally	Satisfaction with local democracy
Experienced a referendum	1		
Trust in municipal boards generally	-,001 (15204)	1	
Satisfaction with local democracy	,007 (15252)	,274** (14885)	1

Notes:

** indicates significance at $p < .001$