

More than opinion expression: Secondary effects of intra-party referendums on party members

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Abstract

As political parties expand opportunities for intra-party participation, understanding the effects of participatory events on party actors becomes more important. This article investigates the consequences of an intra-party referendum in a state branch of Germany's CDU on beliefs and attitudes of party members. We use longitudinal survey data bracketing a non-binding issue referendum on the party's stance on same-sex marriage. Our analysis shows that the referendum had secondary effects that went beyond the referendum's primary goal of delivering an informal opinion poll to the party leadership. The experience of having a say in an important policy decision fostered members' sense of party-specific efficacy. Furthermore, the referendum provided party members with information on elite positions and stimulated leadership evaluation based on issue congruence. Altogether, involvement in intra-party decision-making promotes beliefs and behaviors among the rank-and-file that are relevant to uphold a vivid and empowering party life.

Key words

Party members, party leaders, intra-party democracy, political efficacy, participation, panel survey

Introduction¹

In many Western democracies, political parties gradually have extended opportunities for intra-party participation, be it through referendums on policy, binding decisions on coalition agreements, or leadership selection (Cross and Blais, 2012; Cross and Pilet, 2015; Gauja, 2015). Granting the rank-and-file more participatory rights has an influence on the leaders a party chooses and the policy platform it adopts (e.g., Pruyssers et al., 2017). Beyond primary effects on decision outcomes, more inclusive decision-making processes transform the organizational environment, in which party members are embedded. These organizational changes may thus produce secondary effects on attitudes and behaviors of party members and elites as well as the relations between both.

Focusing on party members, providing opportunities to decide on policies or personnel, first, may stimulate members' sense of party-specific political efficacy. As a consequence, party membership could appear more rewarding (e.g., Scarrow, 2014; Whiteley et al., 1994) which may in turn contribute to halting the trend of membership decline (e.g., van Biezen et al., 2012). Efficacy-inducing results of participatory involvement are well anchored in psychological theory (Caprara et al., 2009) and generally expected among party scholars (Scarrow, 2014; van Haute and Gauja, 2015). However, whether participation actually fosters perceived efficacy has been rarely tested empirically among party members (c.f. Scarrow, 2014: 176; but see Kosiera-Pedersen et al., 2017). Second, considering the case of intra-party policy referendums, we argue that these participatory events not only shape policy outcomes but may also influence how the rank-and-file evaluates party leaders. Referendums elicit a stream of communication during which party members become increasingly aware of the issue itself and more knowledgeable about potentially heterogeneous stances of intra-party elites on that issue. Thereby, policy referendums may help members to judge party elites in terms of political issues – and may fuel policy-based leadership selection. Intra-party referendums may thus exert secondary effects on party members that go well beyond their policy outcome.

The lacuna of evidence on micro-level effects of intra-party participation may in part reflect a lack of adequate data. To analyze intra-party politics from the perspective of

¹ Reproduction files can be obtained at <http://dx.doi.org/10.7802/1533>

party members, surveys of party members are necessary. Conducting member surveys usually requires cooperation with party organizations (for a different approach see: Webb et al., 2017). This requirement complicates the administration of survey questions on perceptions of elites and intra-party processes. Furthermore, studying how members' attitudes change in the wake of participatory processes demands longitudinal surveys of members before and after that event. For this study, we were able to address these practical challenges by securing the cooperation of the Berlin state branch of Germany's Christian Democrats (CDU). We collected survey data before and after an intra-party referendum on same-sex marriage. This unexpected issue referendum served as exogenous influence whose effects on member attitudes we aim to capture with data from the two-wave panel survey. Using this design, we demonstrate that the referendum bolstered members' sense of political efficacy. Moreover, party members evaluated like-minded party elites more favorably and punished politicians who held opposing policy views after intra-party communication during the referendum process had revealed diverging issue-stances of party elites. Accordingly, the referendum helped party members to hold elites accountable based on political issues.

This article proceeds in the following steps. First, we introduce the theoretical reasoning behind two types of secondary effects of intra-party participation. Thereafter, we describe the empirical case, which is used to investigate these effects and develop specific research questions and hypotheses. After a description of the data and methodology, we present the results of our analysis. We conclude by discussing implications of our findings for assessing the ongoing expansion of intra-party democracy in many party organizations.

Theory: Intra-party referendum campaigns and their effects on party members

Party statutes regulate members' participatory rights and the organizational environment in which party members are embedded. Formal rules frame how members experience their political engagement. Therefore, changes in the organizational context likely leave traces on attitudes and behaviors of the organization's members. We will investigate how the experience of a decisive intra-party issue referendum affects party members in two regards. First, we elaborate how the act of political participation fosters

party-specific efficacy among members. Second, we discuss how intra-party referendums strengthen issue-based elite appraisal.

For the decision to join or to stay engaged in a political party, political benefits are a central factor. Having a say in party-related issues matters to present and potential party members (Scarrow, 2014: 156–173; Whiteley et al., 1994; Kosiera-Pedersen et al., 2017). Feelings of party-specific efficacy, i.e. perceiving oneself as capable of influencing the political processes within the party, are thus important for party members' attitudes and behavior. One's sense of efficacy responds to experiences in domain-relevant situations (Caprara et al., 2009: 1003). In this vein, scholars argued that feelings of political efficacy may be stimulated by the provision of opportunities to vote in elections and referendums, by actual participation in elections and referendums, and by learning that one's preferred option got elected (Anderson, 2007; e.g. Clarke and Acock, 1989; Smith and Tolbert, 2007). Correspondingly, experiences with intra-party processes may be important for party-specific efficacy. Building on the above arguments, in one line of reasoning, awareness of the mere opportunity to cast a ballot in an intra-party decision-making process signals to party members that they have a say and may thus stimulate feelings of party-specific efficacy (e.g., Mendelsohn and Cutler, 2000). In another version, actual participation in an intra-party vote fosters party-specific efficacy because it provides members with the experience of having a say (e.g., Clarke and Acock, 1989). A third version suggests that being on the winner's side of an intra-party vote stimulates feelings of party-specific efficacy (e.g., Anderson, 2007; Clarke and Acock, 1989). In any case, these effects are only likely if members experienced the intra-party vote as an appropriate opportunity to express one's opinion and to influence intra-party processes. If party elites, for example, overrule the rank-and-file's decision or if the referendum was perceived as unfair for other reasons, that experience might even exert detrimental effects on feelings of efficacy.

Policy referendums may also help to overcome gaps in policy preferences between the rank-and-file party leaders and the members. Scholars have documented differences in policy views between the party leadership and party members (Carroll and Kubo, in press; May, 1973; Kölln and Polk, 2017; van Holsteyn et al., 2015). Quite obviously, issue referendums may foster responsiveness because members themselves make a binding decision that reflects their preferences or because they force leaders to consent to the winning position due to the perceived legitimacy of the decision-making procedure. However, by eliciting a stream of policy-related political communication,

referendums could foster the issue congruence between leaders and party members in yet another, subtler way.

Evaluating party elites by their issue stances is a pre-requisite for selecting party leaders with congruent issue views. Issue-based leader appraisal cannot be taken for granted, however. Like policy voting in elections, an issue-based model of leader appraisal rests on several conditions (Campbell et al., 1960: 169–171). As a minimum criterion, party members are required to have policy preferences. Otherwise, they lack a policy-related yardstick to evaluate leaders. Moreover, party members must perceive the policy positions of leaders to evaluate them in terms of policies. These perceptions need to be accurate in order to adequately reward or sanction politicians for their policy stances. Finally, members need to be motivated to consider policy-based considerations when evaluating leading politicians, rather than a plethora of other factors like character. Against these conditions, the long-standing skepticism about party members' inattentiveness to and lack of knowledge about party elite's behavior (Katz and Mair, 1995; Michels, 1968; Pedersen et al., 2004; Saglie and Heidar, 2004; Zielonka-Goei, 1992) suggests that policy-based leader appraisal is unlikely. Yet, contextual factors such as intra-party referendums might facilitate policy-based evaluations of party leaders.

Intra-party referendums create conditions that are conducive to issue-based evaluations of party elites in two ways. First, referendums enhance members' knowledge about party elites and their political stances. As they fear voter punishment for party disunity (Greene and Haber, 2015), party elites usually avoid displaying disagreement about policies (Depauw and Martin, 2008) although they, privately, often hold conflicting political opinions (Carroll and Kubo, in press). Referendums on a particular policy reveal the divisions inside the party leadership because they force party elites to take a stance. Party leaders who otherwise might avoid highlighting policy positions that signal intra-party controversies have incentives to take sides on a referendum's issue. Accordingly, party members may thus learn about policy positions of party elites and get in a better position to evaluate party leaders in terms of policy opinions. Second, referendums narrow the members' focus on a specific policy issue. They set in motion a range of issue-related discussions and communications and thereby increase the salience of the policy issue. In effect, party members may become more inclined to rely on issue opinions when forming opinions about party elites. Altogether, a referendum

may foster knowledge about policy positions leading politicians hold and the saliency of issue orientations and may thus make policy-based leader appraisal more likely.

The case: intra-party referendum about same-sex marriage at the state level in Germany

To understand the effects of opportunities for decisive intra-party participation, we study a policy referendum in a regional branch of Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU). In summer 2015, the CDU Berlin, a party branch comprising about 12,500 members, held an intra-party referendum on the legalization of same-sex marriage. The referendum consulted party members on whether the state party should support or oppose a bill that was put to the vote in Germany's federal assembly, entailing a comprehensive equalization of the legal status of homo- and heterosexual couples. Although later, in 2017, the German Parliament ratified a law enabling same-sex marriage with support of a minority of CDU MP's, the party has been deeply divided on this hot-button issue. This is especially true for the Berlin branch, reflecting the city's status as a liberal and progressive metropolis and the party's conservative roots. This split can be seen as one reason for the party leadership's decision to ask party members to express their views on this question in a formally non-binding issue-referendum.² To enable a nuanced expression of opinion, the referendum's steering committee offered several answer options on whether a person agrees that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry: Strongly agree; tend to agree; neither agree nor disagree; tend to disagree; disagree strongly; the topic is not important to me.

Intra-party referendums are not common in German political parties. In fact, the referendum in the state branch of Berlin was the first issue-vote in the history of the CDU. Therefore, experiencing the organizational innovation may have had a particular impact on the perception of members' capacity to influence party policies compared to parties where inclusive member participation is commonplace. The party leadership may have further underscored the feeling of self-determination in decision-making because it remained neutral and refrained from applying any pressure on members to

² <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/queerspiegel/streit-um-die-ehe-fuer-alle-homo-ehe-spaltet-berliner-cdu/11991776.html>

vote in one way or the other.³ As the referendum can be considered meaningful and fair, the condition for effects on members' party-specific efficacy is met. It is thus reasonable to test the three versions of the efficacy hypothesis. The first version refers to the stream of political communication, which surrounds the participatory event. Because the opportunity to exercise member rights signals inclusiveness, awareness of the chance to participate is expected to suffice in order to stimulate one's sense of efficacy. Accordingly, awareness of the intra-party referendum increases the sense of party-specific efficacy (H1).

A more demanding argument locates the stimulating effect in the formative experience of actual participation. Therefore, the positive consequences of the referendum are confined to those party members who turned out to cast a ballot. Consequently, participation in the referendum increases the sense of party-specific efficacy (H2).

According to the instrumental argument, by contrast, the effects on efficacy are outcome-dependent and hinge on the individual status as winner or loser of the referendum. The sense of party-specific efficacy thus should increase among members whose political preference prevails in the policy referendum (H3).

With regard to the referendum's ramifications in fostering the evaluation of party leaders by their policy stances, it is important that party members possess crystallized issue attitudes. Like in other countries (e.g., Paluck and Green, 2009), attitudes toward same-sex marriage proved quite stable among German voters in the period under study. Using data from a long-term panel conducted in the framework of the German Longitudinal Election Study (Roßteutscher et al. 2017), over-time correlations of attitudes toward child adoption by same-sex couples during the 2013-2017 period hovered around $r = 0.8$ depending on the length of the interval between panel waves (2013-17: .77; 2016-7: .80; $N=1,881$). Given the importance of this issue for the party's identity as a culturally conservative political force, there is no reason to believe that CDU members held less crystallized attitudes toward this issue than the general population. It is thus fair to consider same-sex marriage a candidate to evaluate party leaders by their positions on political issues.

The referendum stimulated communications that provided party members with information and focused attention on the issue. While national media scarcely covered

³ <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/berlin/christian-hausmann-kurios--berliner-cdu-abgeordneter-sagt-ja-und-nein-zur-ehe-fuer-alle-22811284>

the vote, it was preceded by an extensive information campaign within the party. Because the official party leadership remained neutral, it played no role as a cue giver, which emphasized the role of other actors in the party. Ad-hoc factions emerged to advocate their stances on same-sex marriage. Conservative members of the state assembly and other prominent politicians drafted an open letter arguing against same-sex marriage.⁴ Proponents of liberal marriage laws responded with open letters arguing for their position⁵ and published op-eds in a regional newspaper.⁶ There is thus reason to believe that the intra-party referendum not only focused the attention of the rank-and-file on same-sex marriage but also made them increasingly aware of where prominent politicians stood on that issue. Thereby, the referendum revealed previously unknown elite heterogeneity. This fresh knowledge about issue stances of leading politicians might then factor into how they were evaluated by party members. Put differently, the description of the referendum under observation (moderate importance, intense communication, and elite heterogeneity) suggests that the requirements for issue-based elite evaluations are met in this case. We therefore state the fourth hypothesis:

The policy referendum facilitated issue-based elite appraisal by party members (H4).

Data and methodology

In our analysis, we use longitudinal survey data collected before and after the issue referendum. The first survey wave was fielded about two weeks after the party's steering committee decided to hold the referendum (timetable: Appendix A1). However, communicative outreach was just accelerating at the time of survey start and the referendum was held only weeks after. Thus, regarding the referendum and the associated stream of communication as the quasi-experimental treatment, we consider wave 1 as pre-treatment wave.⁷ Survey wave 2 was fielded more than one month after

⁴ <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/queerspiegel/streit-um-die-ehe-fuer-alle-homo-ehe-spaltet-berliner-cdu/11991776.html>

⁵ <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/berlin/christian-hausmann-kurios--berliner-cdu-abgeordneter-sagt-ja-und-nein-zur-ehe-fuer-alle-22811284>

⁶ <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/queerspiegel/cdu-vize-stefan-evers-zur-ehe-fuer-alle-wir-habenden-kulturkampf-um-die-ehe-gewonnen/11996684.html>, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/thomas-heilmann-zur-cdu-befragung-ja-zur-ehe-fuer-alle/11995526.html>

⁷ To the extent that wave-1 measures are confounded by the treatment, this influence works against finding treatment effects and makes our test more conservative.

the referendum results were announced.⁸ Bearing in mind that communication effects are subject to steep effect decay (Hill et al., 2013), the long time-period between treatment and measurement also renders the research design to identify treatment effects conservative.

The party member survey was conducted online. The party secretariat sent individualized survey invitation to all members with valid email addresses. Overall, 6,262 of roughly 12,500 members were invited to participate in an academic survey on behalf of the University of Mannheim. 1,019 members responded to the survey in wave 1 (W1). In wave 2 (W2), 627 members participated. 324 members responded to both surveys. Respondents answered a 20-minutes (W1) and 15-minutes (W2) German-language questionnaire (Wuttke et al., 2017). German question wordings and English translations of the relevant questions are reported in appendix A2. Unless indicated otherwise, all variables were recoded to range from 0 to 1 (see Appendix A3 for distributions of key variables).

Main variables of interest are *party-specific political efficacy* and the *evaluation of party politicians*. Party-specific political efficacy was assessed with a two-item measure.⁹ The first item asks whether respondents think that members have many opportunities to express opinions. The second item asks respondents whether they believe that the party makes efforts to find new ways to consult members. We collapsed these items to get a summary indicator (Pearson's r : 0.67 (W1), 0.68 (W2)). To gauge respondents' overall perceptions of the referendum process, they were asked whether they perceived the referendum as enrichment for the party's culture of debate. Several indicators are used to disentangle the pathways of the referendum's effects on party-specific efficacy. The degree to which respondents felt informed about the referendum measures awareness of the referendum process. Self-reported turnout in the referendum is used to investigate whether actual participation has an additional stimulating effect. Finally, we devised a subjective and an objective measure to capture a person's status

⁸ Due to technical problems with the survey invitation, half of the respondents could participate in wave 2 only after another invitation was sent three weeks later. Accounting for the time of survey participation does not change results.

⁹ Researchers proposed the conceptual distinction between external and internal political efficacy (e.g., Craig, 1979). Our hypotheses speak to the external dimension of efficacy and by referring to characteristics of the party organization our measurement instrument taps primarily into this dimension of efficacy. However, we are aware these indicators also contain references to the actor itself, tapping into the internal dimension. The imperfection of the measurement instrument may attenuate estimates of the hypothesized effects.

as winner or loser of the policy referendum. For the latter, we coded all respondents who reported to have voted “tend to agree” or “strongly agree” in the referendum as winners; all others were coded losers. The subjective measure reflects self-reported satisfaction with the outcome of the referendum.

For the analysis of whether members adjusted their evaluations of party elites after the referendum in reflection of their policy stances, we identified politicians who supported, opposed, or took a neutral position on the referendum question. The state party leader (*neutral politician*) moderated the referendum process and refrained from taking a public stance on the issue.¹⁰ After the referendum, he revealed that he had voted “tend to agree” with the legalization of same-sex marriage.¹¹ Two ministers of the state government (*pro politicians 1 and 2*) were among the most prominent advocates of same-sex marriage and spoke out for marriage liberalization in regional news outlets.¹² In both survey waves, respondents evaluated these politicians on an 11-point favorability scale. Furthermore, they were asked for their perceptions of how these politicians voted in the referendum. In order to test the capability of party members to distinguish party elites with diverging issue positions, we also surveyed the perceived issue stance of a fourth politician, the parliamentary group’s deputy leader (*anti politician*) who, as one of the most visible opponents of the proposed bill, initiated an open letter against same-sex marriage.¹³

In order to explore if elite evaluations after the referendum depend on the respondent’s own position on same-sex marriage, we employ respondents’ self-reports of voting behavior in the referendum. Unfortunately, respondents’ positions on same-sex marriage were only measured in wave 2. We therefore cannot rule out an influence of the referendum process on this measure. However, same-sex marriage has been on the political agenda for long and –as demonstrated above– attitudes toward this topic are rather stable and resistant to short-term changes (Paluck and Green, 2009; Sears and Funk, 1999). Furthermore, the official party leadership remained neutral, minimizing the likelihood that members changed attitudes due to cues or overt pressure. Finally, even though the self-reported attitude towards gay rights is an imperfect measure, our

¹⁰<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/queerspiegel/cdu-berlin-gegen-ehe-fuer-alle-frank-henkel-keine-einfach-zu-beantwortende-frage/12099882.html>

¹¹<http://www.bz-berlin.de/landespolitik/berliner-cdu-mitglieder-stimmen-gegen-ehe-fuer-alle>

¹²<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/thomas-heilmann-zur-cdu-befragung-ja-zur-ehe-fuer-alle/11995526.html>

¹³ <http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article205465413/So-streitet-die-Berliner-CDU-ueber-die-Ehe-fuer-alle.html>

ability to compare intra-individual changes in the evaluations of the two pro politicians with dynamics in evaluations of the neutral politician strengthens the validity of the quasi-experimental findings. The neutral politician serves as a control case as he is not expected to be judged for issue stances.

Table 1: Official and reported voting behavior

	Survey	Official result
Participation	89	39
Strongly agree	32	35
Tend to agree	11	7
Neither agree nor disagree	6	2
Tend to disagree	10	7
Strongly disagree	38	45
Topic not important	4	3

Note: Entries are column percentages. The survey results reported in the first column stem from wave 2 (N=304).

In our analysis, we make use of survey data. Survey data is prone to a number of potential errors regarding sampling and measurement (Weisberg, 2005). It is well known that responses to survey invitations depend on how relevant and interesting a person finds the topic of the survey (e.g., Faas and Schoen, 2006). Therefore, party member surveys are prone to over-represent individuals who are more involved in party-related activities. To explore the size of this bias, we compared the official referendum results with the reported voting behavior in the survey sample.

Table 1 Table 1 shows that at the aggregate level respondents' reported voting behavior on same-sex marriage mirrors closely the official referendum results. Yet, the reported participation rate of 85% among survey respondents is much higher than the official turnout rate of 39%. While part of this difference is likely caused by the tendency to over-report political participation in surveys (e.g., Ansolabehere and Hersh, 2012), it also indicates that chronically involved party members are over-represented in the sample, as compared to the membership of the Berlin CDU as a whole. The longitudinal nature of the survey enables tracing intra-individual developments in the attitudes of party members. However, this type of survey data faces the potential problem of systematic panel attrition. Still, there is no evidence for biased panel mortality in our sample: Neither party involvement nor other explanatory or outcome variables are associated with the likelihood to participate in both survey waves (Table 3, Appendix A4). Overall, this discussion suggests that the sample is primarily comprised of politically involved respondents who closely follow party affairs, who are satisfied with the party, and who possess rather stable and inert political attitudes. Hence, the respondents are disproportionately likely to notice party-related events, which presumably leads to under-estimation of the effects we proposed in the hypotheses.¹⁴

Results

In investigating potential secondary consequences of the issue-referendum on the attitudes of party members, we first test the efficacy hypothesis. Second, we test whether the referendum fostered the evaluation of party leaders in terms of issue stances. We introduce each analysis with descriptive statistics of attitudes and perceptions of party members that are relevant for the hypothesis in order to account for the characteristics of the specific case under observation.

Participation and party-specific efficacy

We argued that the referendum promoted the sense of party-specific political efficacy, unless it was perceived as unfair. Table 2 provides some evidence on respondents'

¹⁴ Appendix 4 discusses conditioning effects and the regression-to-the-mean phenomenon.

perceptions of the referendum and shows that the majority of party members perceived the referendum as enrichment of the debate culture within the party. It is thus reasonable to conclude that a large majority considered the referendum process as valuable, rather than unfair or biased. In this case, the necessary condition for a beneficial effect of the referendum on political efficacy is thus met.

Table 2: Perception of referendum process: ‘Referendum was enrichment’ (in percent)

	Share
Strongly agree	42
Tend to agree	32
Neither / nor	15
Tend to disagree	7
Strongly disagree	4

Note: Only respondents who participated in both survey waves, surveyed in wave 2 (N=301).

In order to explore whether the referendum actually made a difference, we compare party-specific efficacy before and after the referendum. The results reported in Figure 1 demonstrate that from the first to the second wave the distribution the number of respondents who felt very efficacious in their role as party members increased considerably. By contrast, the share of respondents who reported a low and very low sense of party-specific political efficacy decreased considerably. As additional analyses of intra-individual dynamics confirm, the sense of party-specific political efficacy increased strongest among members who had been most skeptical about their political capacities before the referendum took place (see Table 4, appendix A4). Overall, the effect size of the referendum on party-specific efficacy is substantial. On a scale from 0 to 1, the mean value increased by half a standard deviation from 0.53 (SD: 0.24) in wave 1 to 0.62 (0.24) in wave 2.

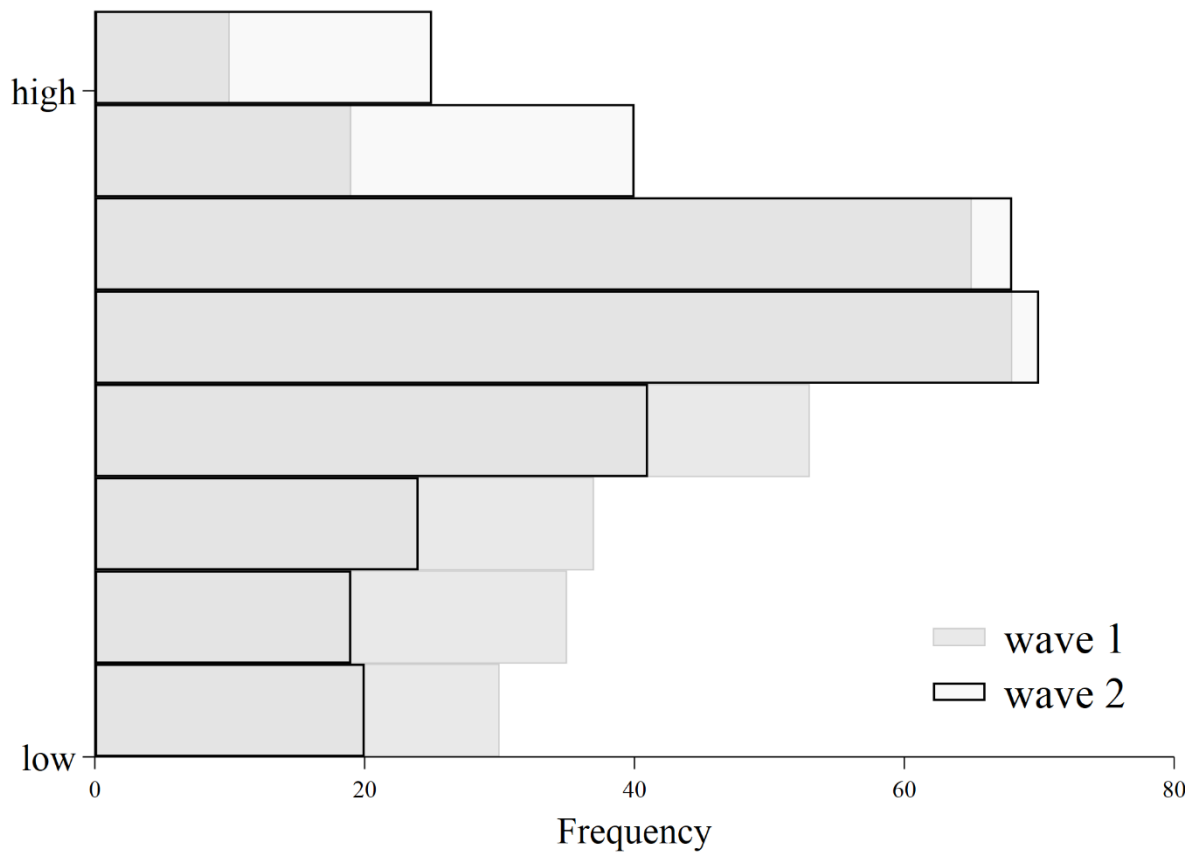


Figure 1

Note: Only respondents who participated in both survey waves (N=300).

After having established that the referendum stimulated members' sense of political efficacy, we test the hypotheses about underlying mechanisms. Table 3 reports the results from regressions on a person's level of party-specific efficacy after the referendum. Each regression includes efficacy before the referendum as predictor. The respective coefficients represent the stable portion of how influential a person feels in the role as a party member. Because the pre-treatment measure is included, all other variables in the reported models explain intra-individual variation in efficacy, i.e. how a person's sense of efficacy changed from before to after the referendum. Models I-IV add indicators to test different pathways through which the referendum may have fostered party-specific efficacy. Model V combines the competing indicators in a comprehensive regression to disentangle each variable's unique explanatory power. Model I confirms the basic expectations about the referendum's stimulating effect on party-specific efficacy. Secondary benefits of intra-party participation are conditional

and depend on party members' general evaluation of the participation process. The regression shows that the degree to which the overall process was perceived as enriching explains intra-individual dynamics in party-specific efficacy between the survey waves. Second, model I shows in line with hypothesis 1 that increases in party-specific efficacy are higher when members felt better informed about the referendum. Hence, the more a person is aware of the referendum process the stronger its stimulating effects. Model II tests whether the experience of actually casting a ballot is associated with dynamics in efficacy-perceptions. Yet, the panel regression shows that participation in the referendum is not related to increases in feelings of party-specific efficacy. Likewise, instrumental considerations regarding the outcome of the referendum do not play a role in stimulating efficacy either. For a conservative test, the subjective and the objective assessment of the respondent's status as winner or loser of the referendum were included separately in models III and IV. Regardless of the type of measurement, being a winner of the referendum is not associated with an increased sense of political efficacy after the referendum. The instrumental efficacy hypotheses (H3) must be rejected.

Altogether, whether the issue preference of a member prevailed in the referendum and whether a member had the physical experience of casting a ballot appears to be irrelevant for secondary effects of intra-party participation. What matters is that members were aware of having a say in an important decision-making process, which they perceived as fair and enriching.

Table 3: Linear regression of party-specific efficacy

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Party-specific political efficacy (W1)	0.52*** (0.05)	0.60*** (0.05)	0.59*** (0.05)	0.60*** (0.05)	0.56*** (0.05)
Positive perception of referendum process	0.16*** (0.04)				0.11** (0.04)
Awareness of referendum	0.16** (0.05)				0.14** (0.05)
Participation in referendum		-0.06 (0.04)			-0.05 (0.04)
Outcome: Subjective			0.06 (0.03)		0.05 (0.05)
Outcome: Objective				-0.00 (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)
Constant	0.08 (0.05)	0.35*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.03)	0.29*** (0.03)	0.11 (0.06)
Adjusted R ²	0.385	0.341	0.342	0.352	0.410
Observations	287	297	286	286	271

Notes: Entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; all variables range from 0 to 1; †: p<0.1 *: p<0.05, **: p<0.01, ***: p<0.001.

Participation and issue-based adjustments of elite evaluations

We start the analysis on the referendum's ramifications for the evaluation of party leaders by their issue stances with a brief overview of the importance of same-sex marriage for the party's rank-and-file and of members' knowledge about elite stances on this issue. Our characterization of same-sex marriage as moderately relevant to members of CDU Berlin is supported by the survey data. How much importance members attached to the issue varies strongly but a majority of respondents perceived the decision on marriage laws as important (see Appendix A5, Table 5 for complete distribution). Reflecting the behavioral relevance of this topic for a large segment of party members, awareness of the referendum process was widespread. 84% of all respondents indicated they were sufficiently informed about the referendum (Appendix A5, Table 10) which suggests that many members followed closely the political communication that accompanied the referendum.

Hence, it is not surprising that after the referendum most respondents knew about heterogeneity in the stances of elite politicians on same-sex marriage. A vast majority accurately perceived the issue positions the neutral, anti, and pro politicians took during the referendum process (see Appendix A6). Because pre-treatment measures of elite perceptions are unavailable, we cannot assess the degree to which the referendum contributed to members' awareness of intra-party politics. Nevertheless, we can

conclude that, in this case, after the referendum process members regarded the referendum's topic as important, perceived themselves as well informed about the process, and were knowledgeable about elite positions. Still, given the nature of our sample, we are hesitant to draw firm conclusions about how much this finding challenges traditional depictions of party members as inattentive to intra-party politics (e.g., Katz, 2001; Pedersen et al., 2004).

If the issue-appraisal hypothesis is correct and if the referendum stimulated the rank-and-file's proclivity to hold leaders to account in terms of policies, then specific patterns of change in evaluations of the party's politicians between the two survey waves should emerge. Our hypothesis predicts changes in the outcome variable to depend on characteristics of party members. If the referendum facilitated policy-based leader appraisal, then party members who opposed same-sex marriage should evaluate politicians who took a favorable stance more negatively and pro-gay-rights party members should rate like-minded politicians more favorably. Opposite effects should emerge for party elites who spoke out against same-sex marriage. Evaluations of the *anti politician* were not measured in the survey, but we include the *neutral politician* as robustness check for whom we expect no issue-related dynamics in leader appraisal. Table 4 reports the results from regression analyses on the dynamics of the evaluations of the *pro politicians* and the *neutral politician*. The pre-treatment model serves as a robustness check: Before the referendum, the evaluation of each politician was unrelated to the respondent's own stance on same-sex marriage. Model *post 1* regresses elite evaluations after the referendum on the respondent's position on same-sex marriage. The model also includes pre-referendum evaluations of the respective politician and thus controls for all time-invariant heterogeneity between individuals. The conservative model specification takes into account that, e.g., irrespective of issues of the day liberal party members rate liberal party elites more favorably. The coefficient on the pre-treatment evaluation in model *post 1* captures the stable portion of this evaluation. The evidence reported in Table 4 shows that intra-individual stability in elite evaluations is fairly strong in all three cases.

The key question of this analysis is whether issue opinions affect intra-individual changes in elite evaluations from the first to the second wave. Controlling for pre-referendum evaluations, the issue coefficient in the first row indicates how strongly the respondents' positions on same sex-marriage determines dynamics in elite evaluations (see also Figure 2). As hypothesized, the issue position on gay rights has no effect on

the evaluation of the *neutral politician*. However, it exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on the post-referendum evaluation of *pro politician 1* and *pro politician 2*.¹⁵ After the referendum on same-sex marriage, party members changed their evaluation of politicians who supported gay rights in line with their own position on that issue. Although panel regressions already control for time-invariant heterogeneity, as an additional robustness check model *post 2* adds several covariates to account for further potentially unobserved heterogeneity.¹⁶ The relationship between the respondent's issue position and changing elite evaluations remains robust. We thus conclude that party members who approved of gay marriage rated like-minded politicians more favorably while the evaluation of same-sex marriage advocates decreases among party members who opposed the law.

Moreover, the effects are substantively relevant. The mean evaluation of both politicians in wave 1 was 0.68 on a scale from 0–1. Strong advocates of gay rights became more favorable of the like-minded politicians by 0.05 (*pro politician 1*) or 0.06 (*pro politician 2*) points compared to respondents who strongly disagreed with the liberalization of marriage laws.¹⁷ If similar effects emerged for politicians opposing the liberalization of same-sex marriage, this referendum may have altered party members' intra-individual rank ordering of politicians. In any event, leader evaluations became somewhat more closely tied to policy opinions, at least in the short term.

¹⁵ We tested another model specification that requires slightly more assumptions and builds more closely on the proximity model of issue voting. Issue distances served as key independent variables in the model. The results remain substantively unaltered with the exception that the effect of the issue-distance of *pro politician 2* has the expected sign but does not pass conventional levels of statistical significance ($p=0.196$).

¹⁶ Because of the highly salient refugee crisis during field time attitudes on migration is included.

¹⁷ Table 1 reports the distribution of the respondents' issue stances, Appendix A3 reports distribution of elite positions.

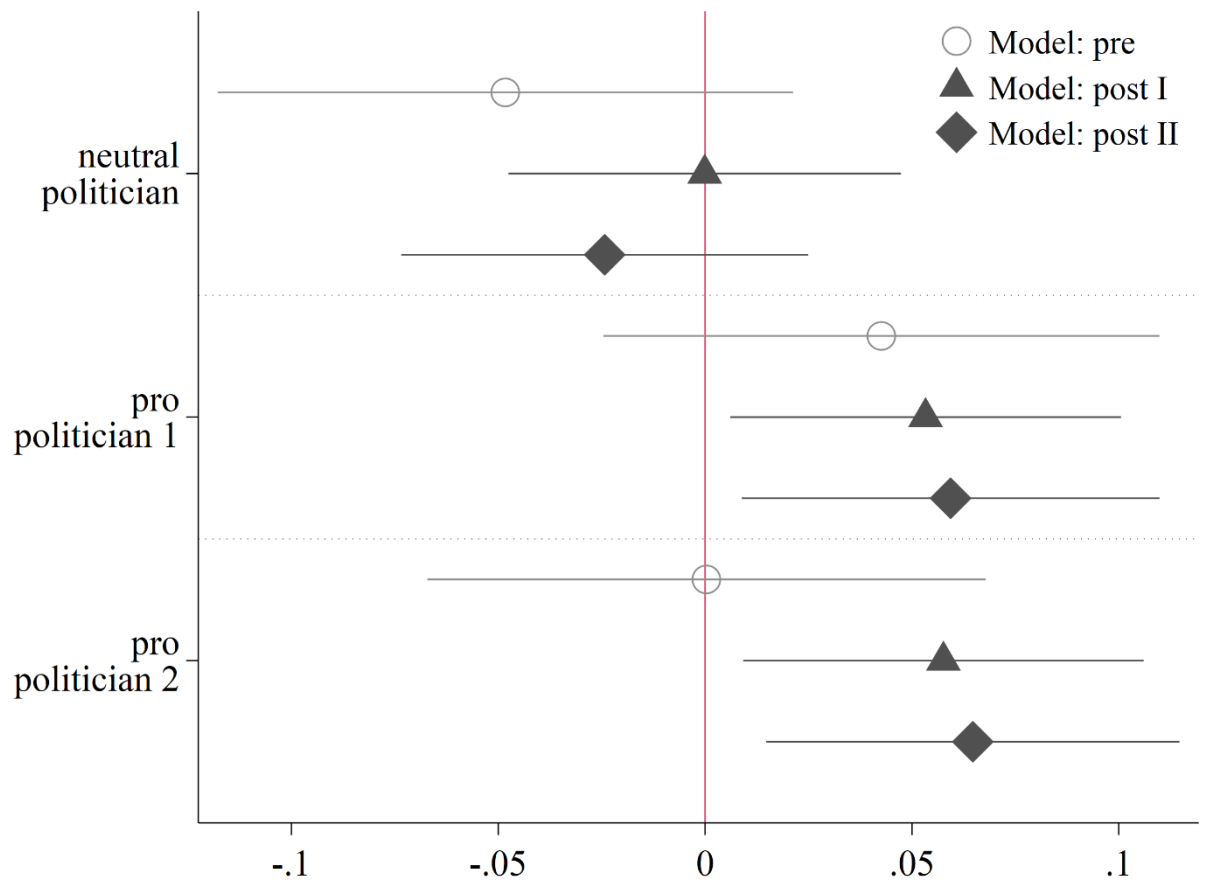


Figure 2

Notes: Entries are unstandardized effect coefficients of the respondent's position on gay rights from the models reported in Table 4. Results on other variables in the original models are not plotted.

Table 4: Issue-based adjustment of intra-party elite evaluations

Model	Neutral politician			Pro politician 1			Pro politician 2		
	pre	post I	post II	pre	post I	post II	pre	post I	post II
Dependent variable	W1	W2	W2	W1	W2	W2	W1	W2	W2
Respondent's position on same-sex marriage	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.05* (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.06* (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)
Pre-treatment evaluation (wave 1)		0.84*** (0.04)	0.84*** (0.04)		0.87*** (0.04)	0.86*** (0.04)		0.74*** (0.05)	0.74*** (0.05)
Hours of party activity			-0.06 (0.04)			-0.04 (0.04)			-0.07 (0.04)
Intended campaign participation			0.04 (0.04)			0.04 (0.04)			0.05 (0.04)
Political sophistication			0.02 (0.06)			0.12 (0.07)			0.01 (0.07)
Attitude on migration			-0.07 (0.04)			-0.01 (0.04)			-0.01 (0.04)
Constant	0.70*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	0.05 (0.06)	0.66*** (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.07)	0.68*** (0.02)	0.10** (0.04)	0.14 (0.08)
Adjusted R ²	0.003	0.606	0.641	0.002	0.612	0.626	-0.004	0.518	0.549
Observations	271	271	254	252	252	237	234	234	220

Notes: Reported are linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; all variables are scaled from 0–1; *: p<0.05, **: p<0.01, ***: p<0.001

Conclusion

As we are just beginning to understand the ongoing transformation towards more open political parties (Cross and Blais, 2012; Cross and Pilet, 2014; Scarrow, 1999; 2014; Schumacher and Giger, 2017; Webb et al., 2017), scholars hold conflicting expectations about the consequences that more inclusive decision-making practices may exert on party platforms and on party actors. Some scholars expect that more inclusive decision-making procedures may revitalize the rank-and-file and foster elite responsiveness to the preferences of ordinary members (e.g., Gauja, 2015; Pruysers et al., 2017; Scarrow, 2014). Reflecting long-standing skepticism about motivation and capacities of party members (Michels, 1968; Zielonka-Goei, 1992), other scholars question the virtue of intra-party democratization and denote it as ‘legitimizing myth’ (Katz and Mair, 1995: 18) without substantial consequences for the behavior of the rank-and-file or the power balance between party masses and party elites (Pedersen et al., 2004; Schumacher and Giger, 2017; van Biezen and Poguntke, 2014).

Employing a more comprehensive perspective on the effects of intra-party participation, this study shows that inclusive decision-making procedures can affect member attitudes in a way that goes beyond the decision outcome. Using longitudinal survey data collected before and after a participatory event in the regional branch of the German CDU, we demonstrated that membership involvement in the decision-making process produced secondary benefits as it promotes attitudes among the rank-and-file that foster a vivid party life. First, we demonstrated that the opportunity to cast a ballot in an intra-party policy debate fosters members’ sense of party-specific political efficacy. Efficacy-inducing effects of the referendum were strongest among members who were most skeptical about their political influence in the party. Effects materialized regardless of actual participation in the referendum and irrespective of members’ stances on the issue itself. Apparently, awareness of the chance to express one’s issue opinion in a fair referendum process was sufficient to feel more efficacious. These are significant findings with implications for the discussion about reforms to expand intra-party democracy. We observed increases in efficacy among individual party members but the strengthened sense of efficacy may advance the party organization as a whole. It renders party membership more attractive, which then may foster the inclination to identify with the organization, to work for its success and to encourage others to join.

Second, we argued that the referendum and the surrounding stream of political communication revealed diverging policy stances among the party leadership on the referendum's issue and focused attention on this issue. After party members had become aware of the issue and elite positions, the rank-and-file adjusted their evaluations of party politicians in line with their own policy opinions. These issue-related dynamics in leader appraisal suggest that party members are not ignorant of elite behavior and consider policy positions when the political context facilitates issue-based reasoning. Further down the road, members may rely on knowledge they acquired during a referendum process in other party-related decisions, e.g., by choosing party elites that hold congruent policy views. We thus conclude that more inclusive decision-making procedures have multifaceted consequences and leave traces on the attitudes of the rank-and-file towards party elites and the party organization itself.

The main argument that referendums cause secondary effects beyond the decision outcome has a general scope. Which types of secondary effects materialize after a participatory event, however, will differ in each case as the outcome depends on contextual characteristics. In this study, we observed party members who for the first time had the opportunity to participate in such a referendum. Presumably, efficacy-stimulating effects decline with increasing customization to member participation. On the other hand, there is no reason to expect decreasing educational effects of referendums with more frequent practices. The issue of same-sex marriage was moderately relevant to party members in the observed case. Members might have paid even closer attention to a more important issue but might also have had more initial knowledge about the issue and about elite positioning, rendering the sensitivity of issue-based leader appraisal to perceived issue importance ambiguous. In comparison to a binding intra-party referendum, the non-binding referendum we focused on may have attracted less attention and fueled less internal campaigning. In assessing the generalizability of our results, we also need to take into account that our survey sample over-represents highly involved party members. Given that stimulating effects on party-specific efficacy were most prevalent among members with low initial baselines, the gains in political efficacy may have been even stronger in the membership as a whole. Moreover, the identification of causal effects suffers from the lack of some pre-treatment measures of key concepts. Because respondents' positions on same-sex were measured only after the referendum, we needed to assume that they and elite evaluations did not change concomitantly. Yet, the robustness check on the neutral politician did

not yield any unexpected results. We cautiously interpret this as support for the validity of our substantive conclusions. In a similar vein, the lack of pre-treatment measures of perceived elite positions served as obstacle to a thorough analysis of learning effects. Furthermore, the analysis of whether leaders were judged by their policy stances was confined to neutral and pro politicians, as we could not observe the dynamics of attitudes toward politicians who opposed same-sex marriage. Finally, without a third or fourth survey wave we were incapable of exploring the longevity of the effects demonstrated in this analysis.

These limitations require careful reasoning when thinking about the generalizability of our findings, but also imply a rich agenda for further research. The latter also includes a broader range of potential effects of participatory events than covered in this paper. In particular, participatory events may also yield less desirable consequences. Considering the results of this study, one might imagine detrimental effects of an intra-party referendum whose process is perceived as unfair and whose outcome is overruled by the party leadership. In order to explore the generalizability of our findings and to examine additional hypotheses about effects arising from inclusive procedures of intra-party decision-making, it is inevitable to have suitable data. We thus encourage scholars to conduct longitudinal surveys of party members more frequently to investigate the consequences of intra-party events from a comprehensive perspective on a variety of outcomes in various political contexts.

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