

What drives process preferences? The role of perceived qualities of policymakers and party preferences

This is the accepted version without final edition. The original article is published in *Acta Poitica* (2020), Springer Nature Link:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41269-020-00176-2>

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Fernández-Martínez, J.L., Alarcón Pérez, P. & Font Fábregas, J. What drives process preferences? The role of perceived qualities of policymakers and party preferences. *Acta Polit* 57, 117–142 (First published 18 september 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-020-00176-2> ISSN: 0001-6810.

Abstract

This article analyzes factors which explain support for the representative model and its two main alternatives: direct democracy and technocracy. It discusses the role played by two understudied explanatory factors: perceptions relating to the personal qualities of the different actors involved in decision-making (i.e. representatives, citizens and experts) and electoral support for mainstream parties (PSOE and PP) and new parties (Ciudadanos and Podemos). We rely on two Spanish surveys from 2011 and 2015. The results show that both perceived qualities and party preferences are linked to support for the three decision-making models. The emergence of new parties in 2015 has reshaped the connection between party choice and process preferences and has made this relationship stronger.

Recent empirical studies have shown the existence of three perceived models of political decision-making processes: representation, participation, and technocracy (Bengtsson and Mattila 2009; Webb 2013). The main question that emerges from this literature is, what are the main forces which drive support for one model or the other? In this article, we examine two underexplored potential explanations. The first relates to the actors who make crucial decisions in each model and how citizens come to value the particular qualities of these actors. In short, we claim that preferences for these models are fundamentally based on the perceived image of these different actors. The second explanation addresses the recent changes in party systems, particularly in Southern Europe. We aim to find out how the rise of new challenger parties has impacted process preferences. We argue that electoral choices in the new party systems are strongly related to preferences for these three decision-making models. The success of new parties in Greece, Italy and Spain is likely due to the presence of unsatisfied political demands (Lago and Martínez 2011), linked to a crisis of representation and a call to renew the political system, rather than programmatic issues or economic voting (Hutter et al 2018; Orriols and Cordero 2016; Vidal 2018). This relationship is also found within

the broader European context, where populist parties are the principal advocates of direct democracy (Bjånesøy and Ivarsflaten 2016); Schulz et al. 2017). Essentially, this article focuses on two aspects: first, how these two factors affect citizens' preferences regarding how democracy should be organized, and second, how these factors are liable to be reshaped as a consequence of changes to party systems.

Previous research has explored the role of one of these two factors in understanding process preferences (Del Rio et al. 2016; Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018). However, there are no studies that have analyzed both explanations simultaneously while controlling the most common alternative variables such as ideology, education, and political trust. The simultaneous analysis of these two factors and the incorporation of the role played by changes in the Spanish party system from 2011 to 2015 are the main contributions of this paper to the literature on process preferences.

We use Spanish national and regional (Andalusia) survey data from the period of 2011–2015. Our results show that both explanations are important for understanding these preferences: the variables which measure the specific qualities of different policymakers help to explain why citizens opt for a larger role in decision-making from politicians or alternative actors such as citizens or experts. Furthermore, with the vote in 2015, the appearance of new parties has both strengthened and reshaped the relationship of these preferences.

The next section presents a discussion about process preferences, particularly in relation to the two aforementioned explanations. We then present our data and methodology. The two final sections present the results and discuss the main findings and implications.

Three perceived models

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's (2002) contribution to the topic of democratic process preferences had at least two important outcomes. First, it questioned the assumption that there was a widespread demand for citizens to have greater opportunities for political participation. Second, it showed that the discussion on process preferences (i.e., how citizens want political decisions to be taken), did not end with the dichotomy of representation versus participation; it offered the possibility of a third model, a so-called 'stealth democracy'. In this third decision-making model, the most important demand was for efficiency, with a strong criticism for traditional forms of representation, without a call for increased citizen involvement. The measures that these authors used and other subsequent contributions resulted in the development of two main types of stealth democracy: expert, or technocratic government, which prioritizes efficiency over ideology; and a form of business led government that uses the management of a private company as a model for public administration. While these two forms may present significant differences and are not necessarily supported by exactly the same people (Fernández-Martínez and Font 2018), analysis of the stealth model has predominantly centered around the idea that the experts are the main decision-makers (Del Rio et al. 2016; Rapeli 2016).

On the participatory side, discussion has also been raised over whether all forms of participation are similar (Webb 2013). Even if different institutional formats have indeed been used (Neblo et al 2010), overwhelmingly, it is the most well-known institution of direct democracy which is the most common: the referendum (Bengtsson and Mattila 2009; Bowler et al 2017). Our analysis will therefore focus on referenda. On the other hand, the representative model is the least problematic, since all citizens who live in democratic systems have direct experience of it. It also has a straightforward system of institutionalization: democratic elections.

How do these preferences relate to each other? Are they absolute preferences, meaning that each citizen would fully support one of the models and fully reject the others? The main conclusion here is unequivocal: no. Research that makes use of bipolar scales which force people to choose, supports the idea that most citizens hold intermediate positions (Font et al. 2015; Rapeli 2016), while most others consider that different degrees of support for each of the models could coexist (Coffé and Michels 2014; Riera and Franklin 2016). This is a conclusion that has also appeared in research based on qualitative evidence (García-Espín and Ganuza 2017) and is reinforced by those who focus on the existing attitudinal ambiguities in the field (Bengtsson 2012). In short, previous research presents a scenario where most citizens appear to have preferences regarding the three models of decision-making. Moreover, these preferences are not unimodal, nor are they perceived as zero-sum choices; most citizens are seen to have mixed preferences.

The qualities of policymakers

Western citizens live in representative democracies. Episodes of direct citizen decision-making (i.e., referenda) and institutions based on the rule of experts (i.e., most central banks) exist in these political systems. Nevertheless, the personal experience of most citizens is primarily based on representative decision-making. How can citizens in these environments develop attitudes towards alternative processes of which they have very limited experience? One of the crucial short-cuts in developing such attitudes is the use of existing knowledge and the perceptions of the main decision-makers involved in each of these systems. In such a way, citizen decision-making could be organized through multiple institutional formats (i.e., referenda versus participatory budgeting). However, even if an individual has limited experience and has, to some extent, considered these various formats, a general skeptical attitude about the abilities of our fellow citizens may generate a critical attitude towards any political arrangement which is based on citizen participation. On the contrary, if one person has a negative perception of politicians, they could be inclined to support any policymaking process where other actors (i.e., fellow citizens or experts) would take power away from politicians (García-Espín and Ganuza 2017). Following this argument, our first claim is that these general attitudes about the principal decision-makers in each type of political process will be central to the development of process preferences.

This brings us to the second crucial question. Which specific qualities of these potential decision-makers are going to be considered? Research on leadership offers important clues. Many characteristics have been found to be relevant, although they can be simplified into two main dimensions: perceptions related to competence and

those related to character and integrity (Kinder 1986; Mondak 1995; Bittner 2011; Cwalina and Falkowski 2016; Jennings et al 2016) that pay special attention to how citizens perceive the behavior of politicians and propose new indicators based on their attributes. On the one hand, politicians' technical knowledge and competence in solving their countries' problems, and on the other, their propensity to pursue general interest over self-interest. In this paper, we use two indicators for measuring citizens' perception about the competence of politicians: level of information and capacity. Meanwhile, to measure their integrity and probity, we use as proxies the extent to which citizens perceive that politicians are concerned about what most people think, as well as the level of selfishness attributed to each policymaker. All these indicators have been used in the aforementioned research.

The relative importance of these two dimensions can vary, not only for distinct parts of the population (Martínez Rosón 2016), but also at different times and in particular contexts. For example, the 2009 British scandal on MPs' expenses clearly increased the visibility of corruption issues. In relation to public perception, this could have led to a greater importance being attributed to considerations of character and probity compared to that of competence. In any case, even in high corruption contexts (Orriols and Cordero 2016, p. 6), moral perceptions have continued having a more limited impact than expected (Allen and Birch 2014; Anduiza et al 2013; Riera et al 2013).

Navarro (2012) explored these two dimensions in the process preferences debate, showing that citizens consider politicians to have more cognitive and technical resources (competence) than citizens, but far less moral virtue (2012, pp. 85–87). Allen and Birch (2015) made a very important contribution to this discussion: one's perceptions of a given actor may not solely have an impact on the democratic model where this actor is most central, but also on others. Thus, they observed that a negative view of politicians' integrity helps explain support for greater levels of popular involvement in decision-making. This is clearly related to an important finding in a substantial section of this field of research: part of the attraction of alternative democratic models (as opposed to representation), arises not only from their own merits, but also from the perceived limits and dysfunctions of representative democracy (Bengtsson and Mattila 2009, p. 1046; VanderMolen 2017; Webb 2013). This argument can also be inverted: a positive perception of the qualities of politicians would explain a lesser degree of enthusiasm towards alternative models. The same logic would apply to other actors (i.e., a positive view of citizens' qualities as policymakers would make an individual less supportive of representative and technocratic models). Del Río et al. (2016) have made the most explicit incorporation of these ideas in their research, showing that support for the representative model of democracy is associated with a favorable assessment of politicians' qualities, while support for participatory modes of decision-making is associated with a negative view of politicians' qualities, but a positive view of citizens' qualities.

Our research makes three contributions beyond their findings: To begin with, it is the first to consider the role played by the perceived qualities of experts, using equivalent measurements for them and for citizens and politicians; next, by going beyond a single point in time and analyzing this factor within a time period (2011–2015) characterized by the transformation of the Spanish party system; and finally, by analyzing them simultaneously with an alternative explanation based on the role played by party

preferences.

From the discussion above, we developed the following set of hypotheses (Table 1):

H1: The perceived competence of the central policymakers in each of the three models is strongly related to the preference for each of them: a positive assessment of their competence will produce a stronger preference for each of these models.

Regarding the effect of moral qualities on process preferences, we expect:

H2.1: An inverse relationship between representation and direct democracy: a negative view of the moral qualities of politicians is associated with greater support for referenda (and vice versa).

H2.2: A negative relationship between representation and technocracy: a negative view of the moral qualities of the politicians is associated with a greater support for technocracy (but not vice versa).

H2.3: A non-existent relationship between direct democracy and technocracy: a better or worse evaluation of the moral qualities of experts does not affect support for direct democracy.

The (new) parties' structuring of process preferences

Literature on process preferences has often highlighted a relationship between ideology and preferences for different democratic models (Bengtsson and Mattila 2009; Christensen and Shoultz 2019; Fernández-Martínez and Font 2018), pointing to greater support for more participatory opportunities among left-wing citizens. Nevertheless, the relationship between right-left ideology and support for direct democracy shows contradictory and country-specific evidence (Bengtsson and Matilla 2009; Bowler et al 2017; Dalton et al. 2001). These diverse views also exist on how the stealth model,3 relates to political preferences. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) claim that these choices would be independent from each other. However, research carried out in Finland concludes that stealth democracy is the choice of critical right-wing voters (Bengtsson and Mattila 2009).

These analyses have mostly centered on ideology and have not often addressed the potential role played by party choice. A recent exception is the analysis developed by Vandermolen (2017) which, in alignment with most literature on electoral behavior, has differentiated the role played by both variables, to explain preferences for stealth democratic procedures. In Spain, Lavezzolo and Ramiro (2018) have analyzed the effect of stealth attitudes on party choice, particularly for new challenger parties. Our argument is that the recent changes in party system are affecting the alignment between ideology, party choice, and process preference. We argue that in Spain, the irruption of Podemos (We Can) and Ciudadanos (Citizens, Cs) has changed the political scenario and made these issues more divisive on both sides of the ideological spectrum. On the left, Podemos and its programmatic emphasis on the importance of participation

may have had a divisive effect among left-wing voters. The public visibility of demand for a secessionist referendum in Catalonia has most likely also contributed to the division, alienating support for referendums among moderate PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Partido Socialista Obrero Español) voters. The same could have happened on the right: in 2015, the new party, Ciudadanos, may have been the option to best represent technocratic ideals. In this sense, we develop the following hypotheses focused on how new parties influence processes preferences (Table 2):

H3.1: Support for referenda declines among PSOE voters (in 2011–2015), as Podemos voters are the most in favor of this 'mechanism' of direct democracy in 2015.

H3.2: Support for expert-based decision-making declines among PP (People's Party, Partido Popular) voters (in 2011–2015), as Cs voters are the most in favor of this 'mechanism' of technocracy in 2015.

H3.3: Support for representation does not show change between mainstream parties (PP and PSOE) between 2011 and 2015.

Previous research has provided evidence that supports our hypotheses. In 2007, Verge (2007) analyzed the discourse of the three Spanish parliamentary parties which existed at that time (PP, PSOE and IU—United Left, Izquierda Unida) in relation to citizen participation. According to her, for the conservative PP, political disaffection results from inefficiency rather than from the lack of opportunities for participation. For the radical left IU, on the other hand, more mechanisms of direct democracy, such as referenda, would be the solution to the problem of disaffection. The PSOE shares the general idea of the benefits of citizen participation but does not make a firm commitment to any specific type of participatory mechanism (Verge 2007, pp.167, 168). Font et al (2012, p.30) showed that most people wanted a greater voice for the citizens and that the three main parties were perceived as mostly favoring representative democracy, with the leftist parties (IU in particular) being viewed as slightly more participatory. Through focus groups, García-Espín and her colleagues (García-Espín and Ganuza 2017; García-Espín et al 2017) have recently shown that both ideology and party preference continue to be strongly related to different social representations of how political decisions should be taken in Spain. In fact, the idea that attitudes towards participation and party preference are connected is not an entirely new one, as shown in literature on political parties. Close et al (2017) have extended this discussion to intra-party democracy, showing that more general preferences about models of democracy are indeed connected to more specific intra-party organization preferences. In particular, greater support for direct democracy is associated with greater support for open primaries. Therefore, in countries which have different parties favoring more inclusive or exclusive intra-party procedures, it would not be surprising to find an association between party choice and process preferences.

As a result, we know very little about how the emergence of new parties which emphasize new political issues has affected the correspondence between ideological self-positioning and party choice. In the Spanish case, two important new parties have appeared: Podemos on the left and Ciudadanos on the centerright (Orriols and Cordero 2016; Rodón and Hierro 2016). Both parties initially built much of their image as political

outsiders, opposed to 'traditional parties' (PP and PSOE). However, whereas Podemos has certainly highlighted direct citizen participation as one of its main political priorities (Chironi and Fittipaldi 2017; Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018; Orriols and Cordero 2016; Pavía et al 2016), Ciudadanos has limited itself to calling for new democratic procedures to fight corruption, to create less partisan governmental institutions and to build a new and more proportional electoral system (Rodríguez-Teruel and Barrio 2016). These reforms do not give rise to a larger role for citizens in democratic life.

The discourse of Ciudadanos has strongly highlighted the need for efficiency and common-sense, as opposed to ideological priorities.⁴ Lavezzolo and Ramiro (2018) have shown that voting for these parties is related to stealth attitudes, negatively in the Podemos case and positively for Ciudadanos. Their findings raise two main questions. Is this relationship between process preferences and voting exclusive to stealth attitudes, or does a more general relationship exist? That is, should we expect a general match between process preferences with party choice for all three decision-making models? And secondly, is this relationship something that has appeared together with these new parties, or was it somehow present in the previous electoral landscape? Lorente and Sánchez-Vitores (2018) have shown that political disaffection was not a central issue related to party choice in the 2011 Spanish general election, but became more so in 2015. We intend to expand on this idea, to show that a critical orientation regarding existing political arrangements is not the only decisive factor.

In this context, two assertions are central to our argument. First, in a period of strong political discontent, where dissatisfaction with how democracy works is central to public discourse (Jennings et al 2016), a social distribution of these attitudes is likely to be seen in the party system. Preferences on how political decisions should be taken will therefore be related to how citizens vote in elections. This relationship may be more visible when we focus on new parties which try to reflect these new political issues in the party system, but if it becomes central in political life, they may end up being visible across all party choices.

In this scenario, parties are not merely passive agents, but relevant actors that contribute to changing the political landscape by incorporating these issues into their political platforms and seeing them as priorities. Therefore, when new parties appear, which aim to reflect this discontent and attempting to make it visible in political life, these issues become more important. In the Spanish case, for example, levels of political discontent peaked around 2013 and partially softened thereafter, which coincided with a degree of economic recovery. However, the existence in 2015 of political parties aiming to reflect these new political issues makes party choice more central to understanding process preferences, even if at that time political discontent was not necessarily at its highest point.

Methods and data

We are focusing our analysis on the Spanish case. Spain has been characterized for decades as a quasi-bipartisan party system. The period analyzed in this article (2011–2015) reflects the transformation of this party system to a multiparty situation. This makes Spain an interesting case study for examining how context affects the relationship

between party and process preferences, especially having two new parties that could clearly represent the direct democratic and the technocratic

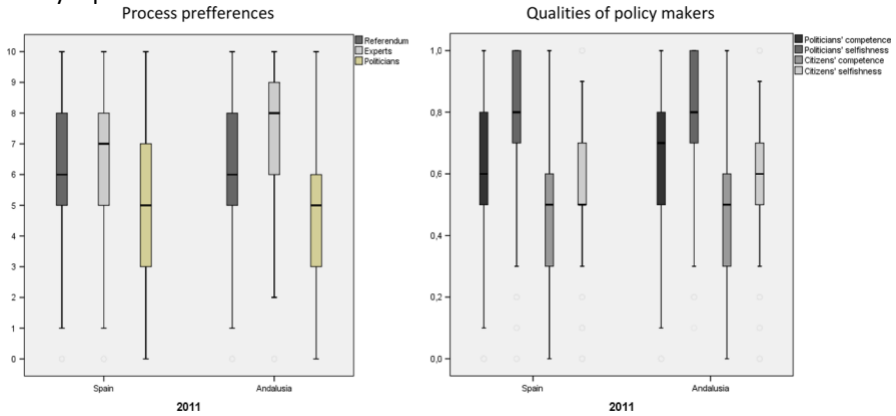


Fig. 1 Distribution of the main variables in Spain and Andalusia, 2011

choices, a characteristic that does not appear simultaneously in many other party systems.

The analysis uses two datasets, one from a representative survey of Spanish citizens and the other from a representative survey of the Andalusian population (the largest region in Spain, containing 18% of the population in 2015). The Spanish data are based on the 2860 study developed by CIS (a public survey research institute), collecting information from 2454 face-to-face interviews with the adult Spanish population. Fieldwork was conducted in January–February 2011, just a few months prior to the beginning of the 15 M ‘indignados’ movement.⁵ The Andalusian data are based on the EP-1510 study (part of the Citizen Panel for Social Research in Andalusia, PACIS), developed by IESA-CSIC (a public institute belonging to the National Research Council). The fieldwork took place in December 2015 and consisted of a representative sample of people aged 16 and over living in Andalusia, made up of 1081 CATI and CASI interviews.

The datasets are comparable since they both, in a similar way, operationalize the main variables relevant to our analysis. The comparability is enhanced by the results at the Andalusian and Spanish levels in the 2011 survey. The distribution of all the crucial independent and dependent variables is reasonably similar (see Fig. 1), except for the vote, where support for PSOE is larger in Andalusia.⁶ The Andalusian data have the advantage of incorporating information regarding the perception of experts, which are not included in the Spanish data. Also, the regional data from 2015 allow us to incorporate evidence from a more recent scenario, after the

Table 1 Summary of hypotheses: qualities of policymakers

Qualities	Hypotheses	Decision-makers	Process preferences	
			Referenda Representation	Technocracy
Competence	H1	Citizens	(+)	

Table 3 Descriptive variables

Variables	2011 (Spain)/2015 (Andalusia)			
Dependent variables				
Process preferences	We would like you to evaluate different ways of making decisions. Using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that 'it is the worst way to make decisions' and 10 that 'it is the best way to make decisions.' How would you evaluate each of these procedures?			
Participatory	Organize referendums frequently 2011/2015: N = 2157/1060; Mean and SD; 6.20/5.95 (2.62/3.27); Ordinal Categories %: Low 14.6/22.4; Intermediate 38.1/32; High 47.3 / 45.6			
Representative	Let politicians make the decisions 2011/2015: N = 2256/1052; Mean and SD; 4.89/4.25 (2.57/3.14); Ordinal Categories % Low 26.6/38.5; Intermediate 47/36; High 26.3/25.5			
Technocratic	Let experts make important political decisions 2011/2015: N = 2294/1058; Mean and SD; 7.07/6.56 (2.25/2.93); Ordinal Categories % Low 6.3/13.6; Intermediate 30.1/28.7; High 63.3/57.7			
(SD2011/15)	Independent variables N (2011/15) Mean 2011/15			
Competence				
Now we would like to know your opinion on different characteristics of Spanish citizens, politicians (and experts)				
Politicians	First, where would you place Spanish politicians on a scale of 0 to 1, where 0 means that 'they are not at all informed' and 10 that 'they are completely informed'?	First of all, in what position would you place politicians on a scale where 0 means they are not capable and 1 are fully capable?	2265/1077	,62/,43 (,27/2,79)
Citizens	And where would you place citizens?		2279/1078	,45/,67 (,23/,23)
Experts	No data (ND)	And in what position would you place the experts?	ND/1075	ND/,71(ND/,22)

Table 3 (continued)

Variables	2011 (Spain)/2015 (Andalusia)		
Selfishness	And on a scale of 0 to 1 in which 0 means that 'they are not at all selfish' and 1 that 'they are completely selfish'		
Politicians	Where would you place politicians?	2324/1075	,83/,84 (.18/,23)
	Politicians do not take about what people think (complementary variable)	2370/1074	,76/,73 (%)
Citizens	And where would you place citizens?	2276/1076	,57/,53 (.23/,29)
Experts	No data (ND)	And in what position would you place the experts? ND/1067	ND/,59 (ND/,25)
Party choice	Spain (2011)/Andalusia (2015)		
PP	1: Voted PP in 2008 national election/2015 regional elections; 0: Other	2454/1081	20/15 (%)
PSOE	1: Voted PSOE in 2008 national elections/ regional elections; 0: Other	2454/1081	30/25 (%)
IU/ <i>Podemos</i>	1: Voted IU in 2008 national elections/2015 regional elections; 0: Other	2454/1081	4/15 (%)
<i>Ciudadanos</i>	1: Voted <i>Ciudadanos</i> in 2015 regional elections; 0: Other	2454/1081	ND/8 (%)
Controls			

Table 3 (continued)

Variables	2011 (Spain)/2015 (Andalusia)		
Political trust	Average of trust in political parties, government, judicial system and system as a whole	2309/1065	,32/,36 (.21/,24)
Social trust	0: No trust at all; 1: Total trust 0: You never are prudent enough; 1: Most people can be trusted	2442/1066	,46/,55 (.24/,27)
Education	0: No education; 0'33: Primary; 0'66: Secondary; 1: Higher education	2452/1081	,61/,53 (.27/,28)
Employment	1: Unemployed; 0: Rest	2454/1081	19/26 (%)
Left (1)	1: Values 0–3 in a 0 (far left)-10 (far right) scale; 0: Rest	2454/1081	26/22 (%)
Right (1)	1: Values 7–10 in a 0 (far left)-10 (far right) scale; 0: Rest	2454/1081	11/14 (%)
Age	Age in the last birthday	2454/1081	,48/,46 (.18/,17)
Sex	0: Man; 1: Woman	2454/1081	51/51 (%)

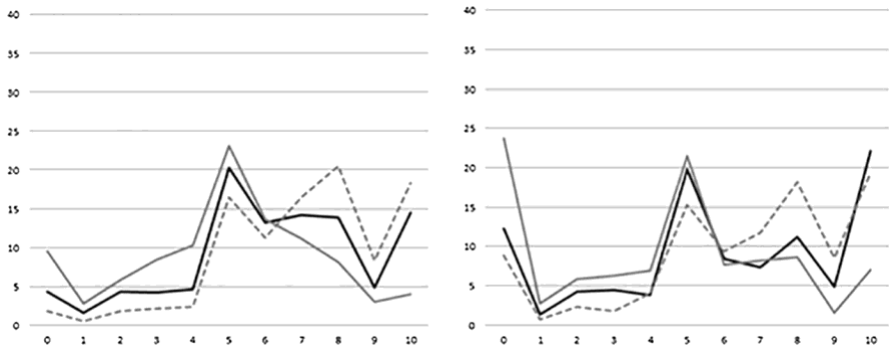


Fig. 2 Support to participatory, representative, and expert models in Spain (2011, left) and Andalusia (2015, right) (%). Note: Left Fig. (2011): Referendum (solid black line) N = 2157; politicians (solid gray line) N = 2256; experts (dotted gray line) N = 2294. Right Fig. (2015): Referendum (solid black line) N = 1060; politicians (solid gray line) N = 1052; experts (dotted gray line) N = 1058

All variables used for the analyses appear in Table 3. Three dependent variables are considered, one relating to each decision-making model: direct democracy (organization of referendums), representative (let politicians decide), and technocracy (allow experts to decide). Our three dependent variables represent common choices in previous research (Bengtsson 2012; Neblo et al 2010; Webb 2013). Figure 2 shows their distribution in 2011 and 2015, respectively. Averages are similar in both datasets: politicians, 4.9 and 4.2 (SD 2.568–3.139); citizens, 6.2 and 5.9 (SD 2.617–3.722); and experts 7.1 and 6.6 (SD 2.246–2.932).⁸ As their distributions do not show a normal curve, they were recoded as ordinal variables (0–3 means low support, 4–6 intermediate support and 7–10 high support).

Party choice is captured through the vote in the last election.⁹ The perceived qualities of policymakers were captured through 0–10 scales. For moral attributes, the questions are identical in the two surveys (asking about selfishness and the statement ‘politicians do not care about what people think’). For competence, the 2011 survey asks about how ‘well-informed’ these actors are, but the 2015 survey asks about how ‘capable’ they are.¹⁰ The 2011 survey includes these variables for citizens and politicians, whereas the 2015 survey also has it for experts.

Other variables considered important by the literature were also included as controls: ideology (Bengtsson and Mattila 2009), education (Collingwood 2012), employment (Vidal 2018), age (Riera and Franklin 2016), social trust (García-Espín et al. 2017), political trust (Coffé and Michels 2014), and gender (Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018). All the independent and control variables were standardized into a 0–1 scale.

We develop ordinal logistic regression to measure the simultaneous effects of these variables. For each of our three dependent variables (referring to each of the different decision-making processes), we have developed several models: the first using just the control variables, the second incorporating perceptions about policymakers, the third adding party choice, and finally, the full models.

The explanatory role of the qualities of policymakers

To what extent do citizens' assessments of the personal qualities of different policymakers influence the preference for one model or another in decision-making? The results indicate that the evaluation of these qualities matters (Tables 4, 5).

The 2011 story is one mostly about moral qualities. The results present a picture that clearly illustrates an open competition between support for direct and representative democracy. In fact, Table 4 (M4 and M8) shows an almost perfect mirror effect when we investigate the impact that moral qualities of citizens and politicians have on these two models. All indicators used in 2011 to measure the effect of moral qualities on direct and representative democracy are highly significant and their directions are the expected ones.

In 2011, for instance, having a more negative view of the moral qualities of politicians—and a positive view of those of citizens—increased support for referendums (politicians are selfish: $B = 1.443^{***}$; politicians do not care: $B = 0.657^{***}$; citizens are selfish: $B = -0.631^{***}$) (M4, Table 4). These results are coherent with those obtained in the representative model during that same period: a more positive assessment of the moral qualities of politicians—and a negative view of those of citizens—increased support for the representative model (politicians are selfishness: $B = -1.667^{***}$; politicians do not care: $B = -0.676^{***}$; citizens are selfish: $B = 0.628^{***}$) (M8, Table 4). Therefore, hypothesis 2.1 can be fully confirmed in 2011, since the expected effect (an inverse relationship between representation and direct democracy) is observed in the six moral indicators used. On the contrary, if we look at 2015, even though most of the coefficients show the same expected effect, only one is significant. Specifically, the disagreement with the idea that politicians do not care about what people think is associated with greater support for the representative model ($B = -0.815^{***}$) (M8, Table 5).

Regarding the technocratic model (M12, Tables 4, 5), support for expert-based decision-making is associated with a negative view of the moral assessment of politicians. However, the consistency of this association depends on the indicator we look at: whereas in 2011, it was captured through the selfishness of politicians

Table 4 Ordered logistic regressions (Spain 2011)

	Referenda				Politicians				Experts			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>
Political trust	– 1'090***	– '634***	– 1'097***	– '624**	3'035***	2'237***	3'000***	2'205***	'742**	1'032***	'683**	'965***
Social trust	'166	'321	'142	'295	– '073	– '139	– '067	– '129	– '823***	– '747***	– '801***	– '722***
Education	– '091	'133	– '085	'145	– '142	– '249	– '139	– '252	– '391*	– '255	– '442*	– '311
Unemployment (1)	'239**	'116	'233**	'108	– '165	– '100	– '167	– '101	'042	'006	'039	'001
Age	– '212	– '122	– '220	– '115	1'422***	1'320***	1'394***	1'284***	'317	'274	'175	'109
Sex	'056	– '023	'056	– '025	– '109	– '092	– '108	– '091	'049	'036	'050	'039
Left (0–3)	'242**	'196*	'163	'103	– '376***	– '366***	– '381***	– '356***	– '328***	– '323***	– '267**	– '263**
Right (7–10)	'047	'022	'103	'103	'249*	'280*	'226	'238	'138	'193	– '071	– '030
Politicians are informed		'270		'288		'950***		'941***		'039		'023
Politicians are selfish		1'441***		1'433***		– 1'667***		– 1'667***		'912***		'900***
Politicians do not care		'620***		'657***		– '675***		– '676***		'099		'104
Citizens are informed		'208		'223		'230		'229		'172		'164
Citizens are selfish		– '633***		– '631***		'625***		'628***		'233		'244
PSOE			'058	'039			'072	'066			'116	'148
PP			– '068	– '121			'067	'099			'433***	'480***
IU			'546**	'631**			– '039	– '095			– '125	– '090
<i>R</i> ²	.022	.024	.026	.026	.142	.201	.142	.201	.030	.035	.036	.042

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ' $p < 0.1$

Table 5 Ordered logistic regressions (Andalusia 2015)

	Referenda				Politicians				Experts			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>
Political trust	−'942***	−'591	−'790***	−'575	3'023***	1'586***	2'923***	1'533***	1'383***	'573	1'380***	'498
Social trust	1'014***	'849***	1'044***	'877***	−'167	−'137	−'145	−'110	'039	−'150	'070	−'117
Education	−'251	−'051	−'384	−'196	'283	'168	'259	'131	−'492*	−'620**	−'551***	−'688***
Unemployment (1)	'197	'212	'154	'176	−'122	−'135	−'089	−'103	−'286**	−'325**	−'250*	−'284*
Age	−2'252***	−2'216***	−2'160***	−2'130***	1'782***	1'616***	1'768***	1'650***	−'267	−'010	−'255	−'041
Sex	'025	−'023	'039	−'011	−'005	−'020	−'023	−'039	'364***	'401***	'354***	'392***
Left (0–3)	'075	'016	−'027	−'077	−'155	−'156	−'024	−'026	−'052	'033	'074	'159
Right (7–10)	−'216	−'218	−'138	−'190	'406**	'375*	'329*	'354*	'457**	'332	'465**	'285
Politicians are capable		−'153		−'031		1'428***		1'433***		'642**		'628*
Politicians are selfish		'350		'398		−'212		−'218		−'215		−'255
Politicians do not care		'268		'252		−'761***		−'815***		'577**		'511**
Citizens are capable		1'151***		1'097***		−'993***		−'949***		−'112		−'063
Citizens are selfish		−'069		−'078		−'172		−'169		'026		'017
Experts are capable		'468		'521		'866***		'850***		3'563***		3'584***
Experts are selfish		−'181		−'209		1'097***		1'088***		−'069		−'079
PSOE			−'444***	−'450***			−'139	−'216			−'145	−'178
PP			−'426**	−'290			'187	'012			−'035	'155
UP			'488**	'468**			−'382*	−'331*			−'235	−'211
Cs			−'226	−'344			'100	'272			'614**	'515*
R ²	0.038	0.119	0.113	0.142	0.195	0.125	0.201	0.274	0.030	0.214	0.077	0.221

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ' $p < 0.1$

($B = 0.900^{***}$), in 2015, the lack of political responsiveness was used ($B = 0.511^{**}$). These results therefore confirm the hypothesis 2.2 to a greater extent. In turn, as we pointed out in hypothesis 2.3, the results do not show that the perception of the moral qualities of citizens and experts affects support for direct democracy or technocracy. These two conclusions observed both in 2011 and in 2015 are in line with the ones obtained in previous studies (Del Río et al. 2016, p.93).

Instead, the 2015 story is one which is mostly about competence qualities. The 2015 results (Table 5) also show that the assessment of the qualities of the different policymakers is positively associated with a greater support for the decision-making model that each political actor more effectively represents. A more positive view of the capabilities of citizens explains greater support for referendum ($B = 1.097^{***}$) (M4, Table 5). On the contrary, a more positive view of the capabilities of politicians ($B = 1.433^{***}$), and at the same time a more negative view of that of citizens' ($B = -0.949^{**}$), both contribute to explaining greater support for politicians as the principal decision-makers (M8, Table 5). Regarding the technocratic model, a positive assessment of the abilities of experts is strongly associated with expert-based government preferences ($B = 4.926^{***}$) (M12, Table 5). Based on these results, we can confirm hypothesis 1.1. according to which citizens' assessments of the qualities of competence of the primary policymaking actors in each model matter in relation to shaping process preferences. This pattern is observed in 4 of the 5 models analyzed. The analysis also shows that although both morality and competence have an important influence upon the process preferences of citizens, the importance given to each dimension has not remained stable between 2011 and 2015.

The explanatory role of party choice

Parties are also a relevant part of the story; as in both 2011 and 2015, significant coefficients can be observed. In addition, these adding parties slightly improve the models. However, this contribution is much larger in 2015 than in 2011. For the three models, but particularly for direct democracy, the R^2 increase is much larger in 2015 when we include political parties.

In 2011, only voting for the radical left party IU was related to preferences for direct democracy (M4, Table 4). As the party was small, the overall contribution of including parties in the model was only very modest. In contrast, in 2015, parties become much more important, especially among left-wing citizens, as both Podemos and PSOE now show significant coefficients (M4, Table 5). In 2015,, Podemos displays similar results to those displayed by IU six years before, in relation to support for referendums (IU-2011 $B = 0.631^{**}$ and Podemos-2015 $B = 0.468^{**}$). On the other hand, the effect of voting for PSOE on support for referendums seems to have changed substantially: from a coefficient close to zero in 2011, to a significant one in 2015 ($B = -0.452^{**}$).

Parties are less central in models relating to preferences for representative democracy. In 2011, their contribution to the overall explanatory power of the model was very small and none of the parties reached a statistically significant coefficient (M8, Table 4). The more critical stance of Podemos is seen in its much larger coefficient

($B = -0.331^*$) in 2015 (M8 Table 5).

We also see important changes in coefficients produced by the expert model, which are more related to changes to parties on the right wing of the ideological spectrum. In 2011, only PP voters showed positive and significant coefficients, indicating that their voters were the most prone to let experts decide ($B = 0.480^{***}$) (M12, Table 4). In 2015, the existence of a new party (Ciudadanos) with a clear pro-technocratic attitude has reshaped the competition around this issue, resulting in it being the only party to have a positive and significant association. The hypothesis that the more pro-expert voters of PP have now become Ciudadanos voters clearly emerges here (Ciudadanos $B = 0.515^*$) (M12, Table 5).

In any case, both hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2 are confirmed. Party preference was already part of the story about process preferences in 2011, but its importance is clearly greater in 2015. This primarily affects the new parties that have appeared during this period, but also affects established parties such the PP and PSOE.

Regarding the control variables, their role remains largely stable when comparing 2011 and 2015: political trust and right-wing ideology increase support for the representative model, and education and political trust are positively associated to support for the technocratic model.¹¹

Discussion

Most of our social and political preferences are based on our own experience. What happens when we develop these preferences without, or with very limited, direct experience? For example, when new parties compete in elections, citizens make a prospective assessment of what would happen if these parties were in government using available proxies (party ideology or the parties' performance in local government, if applicable).

A similar kind of logic can be applied to process preferences. Most citizens of representative democracies have only limited experience of participatory (Gherghina and Geissel 2017) or technocratic decision-making models (VanderMolen 2017). However, they may have a certain image and evaluation of these types of processes based on what they have seen at European Union level, in a neighboring country (i.e., referenda in Switzerland or the recurring technocratic governments in Italy) or in participatory experiences of their non-political life, with associations, small groups of friends or as part of the resident association meetings they have attended (García-Espín and Ganuza 2017); Kriesi 2005).

Our results show that an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of participatory and expert-based decision-making processes matters. Wherever they come from, citizens have an image about the particular qualities of politicians, citizens, and experts as potential decision-makers. These images are influential in establishing their preferences towards democratic models. The more positive the image is of the fellow citizen, the higher the support for a more participatory option; the more negative the perception is of the selfishness of citizens, the higher the support for the representative model. Exactly the opposite happens with perceptions regarding how capable or selfish

politicians are. When the image of experts themselves is introduced into the models, as this article does for the first time, they also provide a relevant explanation for the support for the technocratic model. Thus, our results confirm the suggestion of Del Río et al (2016), regarding the explanatory power of the perceived qualities of different actors. It shows that their logic can also be found in a different temporal and territorial scenario (making the finding more robust) and, also, when the experts' qualities – those not covered in the research—are included in the analysis.

Representative democracy is the model that every citizen has experienced. As it is the dominant decision-making model, evaluations of its performance strongly influence the attitudes that seek to maintain, substitute, or reform it. However, arguments claiming that a lack of political trust is a key explanatory element in the search for alternatives (Hibbing and Thiess-Morse 2002; Webb 2013) are only partly correct and should be qualified. Popular support for participatory or technocratic options is not only underpinned by the dissatisfaction with existing political institutions. In the case of direct democracy, political distrust, added to a negative perception of politicians, is likely ingredient for the support of direct democratic mechanisms. However, the most likely scenario is that these supporters will also have a much better perception of the qualities of citizens and/or experts. A lack of political trust provides part of the explanation, but only when combined with other influences. In contrast, support for a technocratic model is more closely related to the perception of experts themselves than to a rejection of representation (political trust has a small but positive association with this preference).

This is one of the important contributions of this article, because previous research that did not incorporate our central variables assigned a larger role to lack of political trust. When the opinions regarding the various qualities of different decision-makers are added to the picture, the role of political trust does not fully disappear. It is, however, clearly diminished and shows that preferences for alternative models are something more than a pure rejection of the status quo. These results point in the same direction as a similar study about the 2017 presidential elections in France, where Bedock and Pilet (2018) have shown that varying degrees of disagreement with the status quo have distinct consequences in terms of process preferences. Furthermore, our results show that party choice is related to process preferences.

In the current context of political distrust, the appearance of new political parties seems to align their voters with alternative decision-making procedures, as is the case with Podemos voters supporting a participatory model and Ciudadanos voters backing an expert model. Understanding to what extent this process represents a political cleavage that is strong enough for structuring future voting choices would require a deeper analysis. In any case, demand for a deeper democracy popularized by the indignados movement, as well as the broad support for the idea of decision making by independent experts, suggests that this should be taken into account as a potentially relevant electoral issue (Lorente and Sánchez-Vitores 2018). The fact that changes in the coefficients of traditional parties (PP and PSOE) have also appeared, suggests that this is the result of the significant changes in their support base in the recent electoral cycle (Orriols and Cordero 2016). For example, this could indicate that the preference for a more representative or technocratic model has been an important issue for former PP voters in deciding between PP and Ciudadanos, or that a similar division has appeared

among the left-wing voters in their choice between PSOE and Podemos and their position towards participatory choices. In any case, more research should be devoted to what these changes mean and why they happen. This clear relationship does not provide an answer to the more complex question of causality. Are these preferences strong and previously existing or up to which point has this new cleavage been created by the emphasis made by Podemos in participation and Ciudadanos in expertise? We tend to think that the causality works in both directions, but only further research can answer this question and our results can only provide evidence of this considerable relationship and not about the direction of causality between them.

The analysis supports the main hypotheses stated in this paper. Some of these ideas had been suggested by previous research, but we take this several steps further. Regarding the qualities of decision-makers, we show that not only do they matter in relation to citizens and politicians, but also in relation to experts, meaning that they are relevant to understanding support for these three models. Regarding political variables, we reinforce the idea that party preference itself (and not only ideology) is a relevant factor and that the choice for one of the new parties is not only connected to stealth attitudes (Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018), but to support for the three models. Finally, we show that this relationship holds true for Spain and for one of its regions at two different points in time. This makes the findings more robust, as the only crucial change is that the relationship with party choice is stronger in 2015, after the emergence of the new parties.

Second, to what extent are these attitudes clear, stable, and coherent? For example, Smith et al (2010) and more recently Esaiasson et al (2019) have shown that instrumental reasons (i.e., my preferred political position is more likely to be advanced) could be more important than pure process preferences. Even if the relevance of this line of enquiry does not deny the existence of preferences related purely to process, it highlights the relevance of fully addressing its consistency (Bengtsson and Matilla 2009, pp. 1046; Bengtsson 2012). One of the goals of this article has been precisely to contribute to this discussion. One of the contributions is to show that two sets of explanatory factors assist in understanding these preferences, so that they represent more than just a crisis-related dissatisfaction with representative democracy.

We have analyzed these attitudes towards three decision-making models as if they were completely different realities. However, their respective institutional mechanisms do in fact coexist (for example, referendums are carried out in representative democracies, which also include expert-based institutions). While the classical opposition between participation and representation (i.e., letting politicians decide or organizing referendums frequently to make most of the important political decisions) could be perceived as more real and closer to a zero-sum game, the preference for the role of experts seems to be less in opposition to the other models. Experts play an important role in participatory and especially in representative processes. This could be a possible explanation for why the positive perception of experts' capabilities appears as a positive explanatory factor in all models, and why the support for technocratic mechanisms is not connected to political distrust. In any case, additional research should try to test other methodological strategies which seek to confront decision-making processes¹² which are clearly different and establish a fruitful dialogue with qualitative

analyses that point in a similar direction (GarcíaEspín and Ganuza 2017).

Finally, new challenger parties seem to be one of the principal driving forces of change in the political space of Southern Europe (Hutter et al 2018). Another important open question is, to what extent can our results be extrapolated to other south European countries—such as Greece, or especially Italy—where new challenger parties also exist? (Portugal is an exception). A significant part of the literature suggests that, despite the economic consequences of the Great Recession, perceptions of the financial situation, unemployment, and, more generally, the effects of the economic crisis do not seem to be the only explanation for changes in Southern European party systems (Vidal 2018). Instead, a perceived crisis of representation (particularly the lack of confidence in political institutions and the demand for political renewal) stands as an important explanatory factor, especially among the youngest (Riera and Franklin 2016; Rodon and Hierro 2016), which should be combined with other country-specific explanations (Mosca and Quaranta 2017; Tronconi 2018). Our contribution supports the idea that dissatisfaction with the work of representative institutions has played a role in the events, but questions the idea that if lack of political trust was solved, political life would return to its prior state.

To what extent are the references to direct democracy made by new parties such as Podemos, Syriza or M5S related to citizens voting for them? It is likely that their discourse (references to ‘the people’) and practices (more or less inclusive intra-party candidate selection procedures) are affecting preferences towards direct decision-making procedures. Similar implications could be considered regarding technocracy: Ciudadanos has been able to connect with a quite established culture of valuing expertise in the selections of Spanish political elites (Rodríguez-Teruel and Jerez 2018), and the existence of candidates with a marked technocratic profile. Macron in France (Alexiadou 2018) could signal similar developments in other South European countries. The Italian case could be quite different: non-elected independent candidates have been far more common and have been supported by all traditional parties, making it harder for a new pro-expert party to appear. In fact, M5S probably represents exactly the opposite, as it is a pro-direct democracy party, but more than anything, an anti-technocratic party. The discussion about right-wing pro-direct democracy parties has already begun to unfold (Akkerman et al 2014; Bowler et al 2017), but their commonalities and differences compared to right-wing pro-expert parties should be addressed. In any case, in the continuing panorama of considerable political disaffection in Europe, the analysis of alternative policymakers (citizens and experts) in future studies of process preferences should be developed further.

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