TYPES OF DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN EUROPE

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EUROPEANS CAN VOTE IN THREE TYPES OF DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Democratic because all citizens can vote; elections are free and fair, and outcome <u>may</u> influence government policies indirectly or directly.

PD: Parliamentary democracy: MPs choose a national government

DD: Direct democracy: Voters endorse or reject a policy

EUD: EU's Democracy lite. National constituencies elect MEPs who join multi-national Party Groups. Policies need Grand Coalition of Groups to secure absolute majority

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES

1. Ballot offers choice between
   - PD   Multiple parties
   - DD   Binary choice on policy
   - EUD   Multiple national parties in one of 28 national constituencies

2. Policy choice
   - PD   Programmes package many policies; voters chose what is nearest to their weighted preferences
   - EUD   EP Party Groups package many national programmes
   - DD   A single policy

3. Campaigning organised by
   - PD   National parties
   - EUD   National parties: no EU participation.
   - DD   Ad hoc coalitions of party factions, some old and new parties, non-party groups

4. Winning requires
   - PD   Plurality of votes
   - DD   Absolute majority
   - EUD   Plurality within median national constituency is less than one percent of total European vote

5. Outcome decided by
   - PD   Proportional representation; winner has plurality of MPs
   - EUD   Disproportional representation of countries in seats. All national parties small in large multi-national Groups
   - DD   Winner take all majority

6. Accountability
   - PD   High: Perpetual campaigning: opinion polls, coalition jostling
   - EUD   Low: MEPs work in a foreign country in a foreign language and cooperate with foreigners. Once in 5 years seek re-election in a campaign of a few months
   - DD   None. Ad hoc campaign groups close or split after a ballot

7. Policy Outcome
   - PD   Advises governors of voter preferences, mediated by MPs
   - EUD   Limited as EP majority requires agreement by multi-national Party Groups with more than 65 parties
   - DD   Binding national politics. But in multi-level politics an input to multi-national institutions.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY PUTS PRESSURES ON THE EU

The size of the anti-EU vote in a referendum sends a bigger signal of dissatisfaction than a national vote for MEPs. To fend off referendum demands governments may make concessions to anti-EU views (cf. Hatschek; Cameron).

The probability of demands leading to a referendum is one country is low. But since probabilities are independent of each other, the likelihood is high of more national referendums on EU issues. A quick Google check in English finds pressure for a referendum of EU relevance from political parties, politicians and/or social movements in:

Austria
Cyprus
Czech Republic
France
Ireland & Northern Ireland
Italy
Netherlands
Poland
Slovakia
Spain: Catalunya
Switzerland
UK
Scotland

The REDO web site will include information on national demands for an referendum on EU issues, updated with assistance of EUI students searching national web sites in their national language.

POTENTIAL FOR WITHIN-NATIONAL CONFLICT OF PD and DD

1.   Opposition parties tend to favour calls for a policy referendum on a topic where they think there is more popular support than for their own package of policies. Examples: Immigration. Eurozone austerity.

2.   Governing parties resist referendum demands that create the risk of their national electorate rejecting what they have agreed in Brussels.

3.   Up to a point EU policymakers will agree minor but not major policy concessions to a national government under pressure from a referendum demand. See David Cameron's experience. Minor concessions will be made to win a second referendum is held. Inviting voters to reverse their rejection of an EU policy or treaty.

POTENTIAL FOR MULTI-LATERAL CONFLICTS ON POLICY AND LEGITIMACY

PD   Conflicts on policy between a national government and opposition parties wanting to govern. No conflict of legitimacy

EUD   Conflicts on policy endemic within EU institutions, all of which accept legitimacy of EU authority

DD   If national referendum confirms EU policy, no conflict of legitimacy.

DD   If a national referendum rejects EU policy (often national government policy too), this creates a conflict between the legal-rational legitimacy of EU treaty powers and the national legitimacy of direct democracy

For further discussion, see Richard Rose, "Referendum Challenges to the EU's Policy Legitimacy–And How the EU Responds", *Journal of European Public Policy*, forthcoming, 2018.