

With respect to expert-stakeholder PTA considerable experience has been gained with forms of interactive TA. First the various viewpoints of experts and stakeholders are mapped. This information is used to confront the various players with each other's interests and values, and find new and common ways for the future. Communication in the broadest sense is crucial for strengthening the impact of interactive TA. In the coming years the Rathenau Institute will make strategic communication an integral part of the design and management of a TA project.

Footnotes

- 1) The EUROPTA project "European Participatory Technology Assessment. Participatory Methods in Technology Assessment and Technology Decision-Making" was carried out on the issue of participatory technology assessment (PTA). The project received funding from the European Commission (Directorate General XII), TSER programme. It was coordinated by the Danish Board of Technology (Copenhagen) and included partners from Austria, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and an associated partner from Switzerland.
- 2) The basic principles of the methodology of interactive technology assessment are described in Grin et al. 1997.

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Recent Developments in Public Participation in the United Kingdom

by Gary Kass, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology¹

The scope of participation in the United Kingdom is broadening. The paper draws together the recent developments in public participation and decision-making in the UK which are taking place in many areas of public policy; particularly in local government, community health planning and development, and science and technology. According to a House of Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry into "Science and Society", a change is necessary in the cultures and constitutions of key decision-making institutions. The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology has been given a new remit in keeping the members of both Houses of Parliament informed on the development of public consultation and dialogue on science-related issues.

Introduction: Participation and UK Politics

Direct involvement of citizens in political decision-making compared with the involvement of expertise and elected representatives has been debated in the UK for at least 200 years. Some of the leading thinkers in this area (e.g. Edmund Burke) formed theories of government, setting out a dialectic that has run throughout UK politics. The current situation is that the most common form of public participation in politics is voting in elections. However, the level of voting (turnout) is variable, and by continental European standards very poor². Typically, the turnout at national elections for the Westminster parliament is around 75 %,

while for the devolved assemblies, turnout has been highly variable (33 % in London, but 70 % in Northern Ireland). For municipal, county council and European Parliament elections, however, turnout is consistently low, and rarely climbs much above 30-35 %. Box 1 shows these figures for the most recent of each of these elections.

Box 1: Participation in Elections in the UK

Election	Percent of electorate casting
General Election (national)	71 %
Northern Ireland Assembly	70 %
Scottish Parliament	58 %
Welsh Assembly	46 %
London Assembly	33 %
Local government elections	32 %
European Parliament	24 %

Once the public has participated in this way, continued active involvement with politics is not common. Membership of political parties in the UK totals around 1 % of the population, and the vast majority of these people are not active in their parties.

Participation is more common outside of formal politics, through agents of civic society such as charities, interest groups and local community groups. The UK political system has evolved over at least the last 200 years in ways that attempt to allow a dialogue between the formal institutions of government and informal, non-governmental groups. However, although this system is by no means perfect, there are occasions where bureaucrats undermine such activities because they feel threatened by them.

Overall, it is perhaps the nature of UK politics (and people's past experiences of it) that determines the extent to which citizens wish to participate. The national parliament is elected under a first-past-the post system that has no element of proportional representation. The style of politics is largely confrontational and the underlying concept of democracy is a model that effectively seeks to give a government effective power, subject to a system of checks and balances such as questioning, debating and scrutinising the work of government. One deficiency in the UK system is

where there are occasions (as now) where a governing party with a large majority (as now) dilutes the scrutiny role of parliament. Consensus building has not been a tradition in UK politics. However, the devolved assemblies and the Scottish Parliament were elected under various forms of proportional representation. It is too early to say, whether this has had any effect on people's engagement with those bodies.

However, things are changing. The Labour government, which was elected in 1997, has begun a series of reforms of elements of the UK constitution and political system. Alongside the devolution of certain powers to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London, it has set in train a process of reform of the national parliament as well. It has removed the rights of most hereditary peers to sit in the upper chamber of the UK parliament (the House of Lords)³ and introduced a system where citizens can nominate themselves to become members of the upper house, subject to approval by an appointments committee. The Government has been criticised, however, for not yet putting forward any plans for the final reform of the House of Lords.

The Labour Government has also introduced reforms to the governance of local democracy and healthcare through statutory duties on local authorities to consult with their communities about the planning and delivery of services.

Each of these developments has occurred under a framework of *Modernising Government* that seeks to extend consultation beyond traditional methods and reach out and involve a broader range of people.

This paper attempts to draw together some of the recent key developments in public participation in policy and decision-making in the UK. These are now taking place in many areas of public policy; particularly in local government, community health care and science and technology. It is important to recognise this wider context, and not treat any one as a special case. There are many common elements between the participation agendas in each of these areas of policy, and it is important that each is able to learn from the others.

The Broadening Scope of Participation in the UK

In seeking to broaden participation, political parties generally have recognised that members of the general public are increasingly questioning the legitimacy of decisions. Thus, the agenda seeks to improve the legitimacy of decisions, thereby reducing opposition, improving the efficiency of government and strengthening civic society.

At present, the national government is exploring ways to improve consultation, and has recently published a document setting out how it would like to see the process of written consultation improved. It is conscious of developments in other forms of consultation, but has yet to produce a coherent strategy on how it would like to proceed in this direction. Indeed, it has recently set up a number of institutions to deal with certain controversial scientific and technological matters (e.g. the Human Genetics Commission, the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission, the Food Standards Agency, and the Chemicals Stakeholder Forum), and each of these new bodies is now consulting on how it should best consult!

Within the national parliament, there have been a number of recent inquiries by committees that have dealt with the participation agenda. First, the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Lords published a report in February 2000 on the subject of "*Science and Society*", in which it called for greater dialogue and public consultation on issues related to scientific research and technological development. This is explored in more detail later. Second, the Public Administration Committee⁴ of the House of Commons is expected to publish a report towards the end of 2000 on an inquiry into *Innovations in Citizen Participation in Government*. Third, the Information Committee⁵ of the House of Commons is currently examining the information needs of elected members, and also what information citizens would like to obtain from parliament itself.

There is also considerable academic interest in the participation agenda, with a plethora of research centres, programmes, and current and future projects. Finally, there has been an increasing level of innovation in participation

methods, with many "experiments" being carried out into participatory processes including (among others) consensus conferences, citizens' juries, focus groups, and deliberative opinion polls.

Local Government

Evidence submitted to the House of Commons Public Administration Committee has shown that both the volume and diversity of participation exercises carried out by local government have risen dramatically over the last five years, regardless of which political party is in power. In particular, the data show that 'innovative' methods (such as citizens' panels and juries) have risen fastest, although they still represent the minority of methods employed. The most common forms are through written consultation and active participation in the land-use planning process which requires local authorities to seek the views of people on development. This process, however, is notoriously controversial, to the extent that planning inquiries are held under confrontational judicial conditions, with arguments being made in the form of advocacy rather than in seeking consensus.

In an effort to bring some cohesion to this expansion, the Local Government Association (which is the professional body for local authorities), set up the "Democracy Network". This pulled together cases where local authorities had used participatory consultation techniques, and established a virtual network of local government workers and other interested people to discuss issues arising and share good practice. However, the effectiveness of the Democracy Network has been hampered by three factors. First, it has been insufficiently funded. Second, local authority staff have no real motivation to continue to provide material and participate in the network (often due to pressure of work elsewhere). Third, the value of the network itself has been questioned as there has been no systematic and rigorous evaluation of the efforts registered in the network. So, there is insufficient evidence at present on which to base any attempt to establish best practice.

Indeed, this last point has been made in evidence to the Public Administration Committee. Witnesses have been keen to point out

the growth in participatory methods of consultation, but when challenged to show their effectiveness against any pre-established goals (where these even existed), the evidence has been very much thinner. This is of concern as some attempts have been made to produce good practice guides, and a systematic matrix has been drawn up identifying which types of method would be most applicable to which type of problem⁶. Clearly, without a rigorous evaluation framework, it is not possible to say which methods “work” in which situation, and there are concerns that such attempts are premature, fuelled more by wishful thinking than hard evidence of effectiveness.

Community Health Planning and Delivery

The UK is proud of its National Health Service. But increasingly, it is coming under pressure for not living up to the expectations of its users. Often, such concerns are manifested as disputes over hospital and ward closures, the length of time that patients have to wait for treatment, and the rationing of health care. There are also concerns over how health services are planned and provided at the “front end”, that is where patients interact with the system (through their general practitioners, health visitors, district nurses, and hospitals).

Over the last decade, health service planners have needed to respond to growing political pressure for improved standards (e.g. through quality audits on doctors), economic efficiency and public accountability. In many instances, health authorities have consulted with the users of their services, often using more innovative methods such as citizens’ juries.

Further examples include two research projects being undertaken at present by a UK health charity, the King's Fund. The first of these is an exercise in identifying public values related to the health service. Here, researchers have identified 7 key values that underpin activities in the sphere of public health:

- *Equity* – everyone should get their “fair share”
- *Compassion and Altruism* – the importance of putting others before oneself
- *Security* – importance of minimising risk

- *Efficiency* – getting the most out of available resources
- *Choice and Autonomy* – freedom to act according to one’s own desires
- *Health* – what is conceived of as “good” for people and how they treat their own bodies
- *Democracy* – the authority of government to act requires the consent of the people.

A key element of this project is to identify what sort of decision-making processes the public would support in making moral judgements and tradeoffs in the planning and delivery of healthcare. An important finding so far is that citizens rarely want to make these sorts of decisions themselves – they would rather leave the decisions to elected (or appointed) decision-makers. What citizens would like, though, is to be able to trust these decision-makers to listen to the public’s concerns, and to be accountable for their actions.

The other King’s Fund project of interest seeks to explore the capacity of the professional healthcare community to work in partnership with community-based groups. So far, it has identified a number of key issues such as a wide gulf between professionals and the public, where professionals often show little or no respect for the publics they serve, and consequently, there is a lack of trust of the professionals by the public. Also, even where professionals would like to work more closely with communities, they often find institutional barriers (such as organisational culture, processes, structures and incentives) in their way. Other key issues include:

- Whether participation should be a feature of all functions of an organisation or a specialist function within a dedicated unit
- The political context of participation (e.g. the impact on elected representatives)
- The extent of evaluation, even where willing to engage in participatory processes, particularly under conditions of budgetary constraints
- The objectives of participation – e.g. whether it is always desirable to achieve consensus, or whether just eliciting a range of values is required; whether participation is required to make or inform decisions, or to help educate citizens.

The second phase of this project will examine current practices in 5 pilot areas with a view to answering three questions:

- Can organisations identify barriers to engagement with the public?
- Can organisations identify strategies to begin to remove these barriers?
- Would this actually enable better partnership working?

Results from the pilot studies are expected by the middle of 2001.

Science and Society

While the participation agenda has been growing in the fields of local government and community healthcare, it has yet to take hold in the area of science and technology. One explanation for this might be that the culture and subsequent governance of science and technology is such that it is less accountable to society than local government and community health. Similarly, it is oriented at different goals – i.e. the pursuit of knowledge (science) or wealth creation (technology), rather than providing services, and so has excluded input from people outside of an elite of experts.

Over the last decade, events in the UK such as the controversies over BSE, GM foods and a series of significant medical negligence cases have eroded much of the faith that people once had in scientific expertise. It is ironic, because, at the same time, there are indications that people's attitudes to science itself are more supportive; expressed as fascination for topics like astronomy, and increasingly recognising the value of high-technology industries, especially information technologies. Nevertheless, science is no longer seen (in almost religious terms) as bringing a "divine", uncontested truth to the people. This trend does not, of course, stand alone. Many observers (e.g. Giddens) have commented that it is a symptom of the general shift in the developed world towards "post-modern" values where deference to authority is no longer automatic, and people are becoming more discerning about whom they trust. Particularly significant are the pace of change in science and technology, its increasing complexity, and its increasing commer-

cialisation which lead many people to feel that it is "running out of control".

Against such a backdrop, then, there have been a number of attempts to engage citizens more directly in debates with "experts" (as they are popularly conceived) to achieve some sort of consensus over the direction of some scientific research and the development of some technologies. Such activities, aimed at "democratising science", have taken place at two levels:

- *Nationally* – there have been two national consensus conferences in the UK. The first, in 1994 was on the subject of plant biotechnology, and the second, in 1999, on radioactive waste management. In addition, there has also been a national deliberative opinion poll on biotechnology.
- *Locally*, smaller-scale activities have included citizens' juries on GM foods and more innovative processes such as visioning conferences and "multicriteria stakeholder dialogue" on developing local environmental and sustainability strategies.

The vast majority of such activities have been "one-off", often run by academic researchers as "experiments", rather than being integrated, or "plugged in" to formal governance structures and processes.

As mentioned above, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee's inquiry into *Science and Society*, was an attempt both to diagnose the ailment facing the relationship between science and the public, and to recommend a prescription. The report recognised the emergence of 7 key social attitudes to science in the UK (Box 2), concluding that "*society's relationship with science is in a critical phase*" and that this has created a "*crisis of confidence*".

Box 2: Social Attitudes to Science

The *Science and Society* report noted that:

- Perceptions of the purpose of science are crucial to the public response
- People now question all authority, including scientific authority
- People place more trust in science which is seen as “independent”
- There is a culture of secrecy in UK institutions, which invites suspicion
- Issues treated by decision-makers as “scientific” involve many other factors. Moral, social, ethical and other concerns should be included
- What the public finds acceptable often fails to correspond with technical assessments of risk. Among other factors, this relates to how far the risk is imposed rather than voluntarily accepted
- Underlying people's *attitudes* to science is a variety of *values*. Bringing these into the debate and reconciling them are challenges for policy-makers

The report suggested that “*the crisis of trust has produced a new mood for dialogue*”, and recommended that institutions engaged in raising public understanding of science “*must respond to this mood*”. It examined methods for dialogue and concluded that all have value by helping decision-makers listen to public values and concerns⁷.

Furthermore, the *Science and Society* inquiry noted that dialogue would give the public some assurance that their views are taken into account, increasing the chance that decisions will find acceptance. Nevertheless, the committee concluded that nothing short of a change is necessary in the cultures and constitutions of key decision-making institutions. Thus, the report stated “*The United Kingdom must change existing institutional terms of reference and procedures to open them up to more substantial influence and effective inputs from diverse groups.*”

The committee considered whether there should be a new institution to monitor public opinion on scientific issues, and to provoke and conduct public dialogue⁸. It concluded that

“*there is no need for a new institution in an already crowded scene*”, but that they “*look to the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology to maintain a watching brief on the development of public consultation and dialogue on science-related issues, and to keep members of both Houses of Parliament informed.*”

To discharge this responsibility, POST needs to take account of three key issues:

- Where, and how far, active engagement of professionals and the public on science and technology-related issues informs public policy and decision-making
- How good practice in engagement processes can be identified and evaluated
- Whether current research into participation is sufficient to provide the necessary insights to achieve these aims, and, if not, where research gaps exist.

This means that POST needs to have a regularly updated view of relevant research and practice in this area. POST is constrained by its role within parliament from actively engaging in these processes itself to a large extent. Even so, POST does not have the resources to undertake the relevant research, nor organise dialogue itself⁹. However, it can engage with others in identifying and addressing issues arising.

To achieve this, POST will need to¹⁰

- Build links with researchers, practitioners, and users of participation processes.
- Compile database of contacts and work completed, on-going or planned.
- Participate in activities arranged by others to help identify what work is being carried out in this area; gaps and opportunities arising; and frameworks for assessing the value of consultation processes.
- Report to Parliament on significant developments in public consultation and science and technology-related dialogue – including noting their use in other areas of public policy
- Provide briefings on particular issues arising as appropriate – these may relate to the use of participatory processes in consideration of particular issues (such as waste disposal, human genetics, etc), or generic topics in the area of consultation

(e.g. innovations in methods, development of good practice guidance, government policy statements, etc).

At the time of writing (mid September 2000), the government's response to the House of Lords *Science and Society* report is expected shortly. Early indications are that the government will support the general thrust of the Lords' report, in particular, that broadly based consultation and dialogue will need to become part of the normal way of working for all involved in the scientific and technological community. If this is the case, then significant changes will be needed in the culture, structure, and methods of the UK scientific "establishment". This will challenge many traditional ways of working, leading to some resistance. Progress in this direction will be slow, but perhaps the most likely course of action will be a period of reflection, experimentation, learning and adjustment as the capacity for partnership working is built up in the establishment.

Such a "revolution" in governance and science will be followed closely by academia, with many new research programmes in place now, or beginning in the very near future. A few examples include:

- A Participation and Democracy research programme (funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council¹¹, commenced in 1999)
- A research programme on risk, policy and participation (funded by the Leverhulme Trust¹², to commence 2001)
- An Environmental Decision Making Centre (funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, to commence in 2001)
- A Science and Society Research Programme (funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, to commence in 2002)

Common Features of Recent Developments in Participation

Despite the diversity of participatory approaches and areas of application in public policy debates, four common features can be identified. First, the idea behind public participation is that while not necessarily resolving all apprehension and opposition, it is likely to extend public support for decisions. This is based on the twin concepts of *deliberation* and *inclusion* (Box 3).

Box 3: Deliberation and Inclusion

Deliberation

By definition, „deliberation“ implies careful consideration of evidence, but when applied to decision-making, further procedures are necessary:

- The process functions by creating social interaction through meetings, email, internet or videoconferencing
- Discussion and debate progress through a number of means, including oral communication, visual aids and written text
- Participants will hold a range of views and values that should be respected
- Participants should be able to reflect on their views, and evaluate and re-evaluate their positions on an issue as the process unfolds.

Inclusion

Advocates of participation argue that deliberative processes are most effective if they include meaningful participation by individuals and groups from a broad and diverse range of perspectives. In particular, such deliberative and inclusionary processes are most often used to include previously excluded individuals and groups, rather than relying on traditional consultation that attracts only those bodies that have traditionally responded (e.g trade and professional and pressure-group organisations – “the usual suspects”).

There are no precise criteria to define who should be included, but there is a general principle that all those whose interests will be affected ought to have the opportunity to take part. An objection often raised is that these processes involve very few people, and so cannot be truly representative unlike an opinion poll. However, opinion polls are not representative of people's values and attitudes based on deliberation on an issue, rather, they highlight spontaneous and superficial opinion.

Second, is that there are five main potential *objectives* for participation:

- To provide information to enable an issue to be examined more fully
- To aid consultation by enabling interested parties to express their views
- To monitor and oversee specific initiatives
- To identify options available to solve a particular problem
- To construct solutions to a particular problem.

Each objective requires different processes, each with its pros and cons. For instance, some analysts¹³ have pointed out that constructing solutions invariably involves making trade-offs, bargaining and game-playing, while identifying options avoids these potential pitfalls, and can lead to more convincing arguments. Nevertheless, analysts point out that to be truly effective, it is still necessary to ensure that the processes are directed towards some politically relevant topic.

Third, a key issue is who is involved in these broader consultative processes, and *to what extent participants can be said to represent the wider public*. Recent academic research (and common sense!) has confirmed that there is no single, homogeneous “public”. In reality, there is a multiplicity of “publics”, characterised by a set of associations based on a variety of factors: age, sex, ethnic origin, religion, interests, locality, etc. Thus, selecting a truly representative group of people from among such a diverse society is a daunting task. The traditional national political opinion poll with large sample numbers (often over 1000 people) is necessary to provide statistically valid analyses. Many of the processes used in other methods, however, involve considerably fewer people (mostly fewer than 30 people, and often only around 15-20 people), and so are necessarily qualitative. However, various selections are invariably used to make those involved broadly representative of the population concerned.

Fourth, any processes for broadening consultation need to be accepted as *legitimate*. To a large extent, this depends on establishing processes that are credible. This, in turn, is dependent on ensuring that the organising institution is trusted and this itself depends on the extent of transparency and verifiability of the

process. Ultimately, then, there is a need to establish a set of recognised quality standards.

Perhaps the most critical element in establishing the legitimacy of such processes is their formal integration into policy-making processes. This was a problem experienced with the UK’s first national consensus conference on plant biotechnology. However, the second (on radioactive waste management) was specifically timed so that it fitted in between the publication of a report from a parliamentary committee inquiry into the subject and the response from government in the hope that it would be more greatly recognised in the policy-making process. In reality, the event had no explicit substantive impact, but there are indications (from discussions with civil servants), that it has some subtle implicit effects, such as changing the way that the civil servants are thinking about the issue.

Conclusions

There is increasingly widespread use of public participation in policy making. This is seen as a way of strengthening democratic processes, increasing citizens’ involvement in civic society, and to make policy-making more efficient. The scope of participation across public policy is wide – ranging from scientific research and technological development to local government services.

There is an expanding toolbox of methods and processes for engaging with the public in policy and decision making, but there has been relatively little rigorous evaluation of these tools. While some forms of participation will be more effective than others, without proper evaluation it is not possible to distinguish these. Thus, mistakes could be repeated, good practice will not be visible, and resources will be wasted.

The experience that has built up in different policy areas over the last few years in the UK and overseas should be brought together and analysed on a consistent basis to enable researchers, practitioners and users to compare practice and identify the best way forward. As we enter a new phase in the nature of public policy debate, there are many opportunities for expanding public participation. The next five years should be an exciting time – it should be

approached with an enthusiastic, pioneering spirit, but there needs to be ample time for reflection and adjustment to ensure that the potential is fully realised.

Footnotes

- 1) Thanks go to Professor David Cope, and Dr Peter Border of POST for their constructive comments.
- 2) Turnout is one measure of participation, but not ideal. Indeed, there has been a decrease in the numbers of people on the official register of electors. Also, turnout at elections does not equate to people's views on the values of democracy itself.
- 3) It has allowed 92 hereditary peers to remain in the House of Lords for a supposedly transient period, until reform of the House of Lords is complete.
- 4) This committee has been established to examine the quality and standards of the civil service.
- 5) The Information Committee is responsible for advising the House on Information Services provided to Members, their staff and others who work for Parliament.
- 6) <http://www.idea.gov.uk/bestvalue/consult/index.html>
- 7) In July 2000, the House of Commons Information Committee further endorsed this, stating "such consultations are clearly of considerable interest to Parliamentarians, as they represent a new opportunity for democratic representatives to listen to their electorate and inform themselves on the issues of the day."
- 8) This issue has been raised in the context of the House of Commons Public Administration Committee's inquiry into innovations in citizen participation in government. There are signs that this role may be adopted by the Cabinet Office (the department that coordinates policy across central government).
- 9) However, POST has been involved in such processes in the past (e.g. internet dialogues and consensus conferences), and its Board will almost certainly propose similar activities in future.
- 10) There are inevitably resource implications, but it is believed that, at present, these are modest, and deliverable from within planned resource allocations. However, should circumstances change, further resources may be required.
- 11) The UK's leading funding agency for research and training into social and economic issues.
- 12) An independent research charity.

- 13) e.g. *Participatory Environmental Policy Processes: experiences from North and South*. Tim Holmes and Ian Scoones. Institute of Development Studies Working Paper, March 2000.

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TA mit Bürgerbeteiligung: Die Erfahrungen der Schweiz

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Im Jahr 1998 hat das Schweizer Zentrum für Technologiefolgen-Abschätzung sein erstes Projekt mit Bürgerbeteiligung organisiert: das PubliForum „Strom und Gesellschaft“. Zwei Jahre später und nach zwei weiteren PubliForen kann eine vorsichtig optimistische Bilanz gezogen werden.

In der Schweiz ist die Beteiligung der Bürgerinnen und Bürger an politischen Entscheidungen kein leeres Wort. Mehrmals im Jahr ist das Volk aufgerufen, über die unterschiedlichsten Fragen abzustimmen, wie z.B. die Einwanderungspolitik, die Steuerpolitik, die Verkehrspolitik oder auch die europäische Integration. Und die Wissenschafts- und Technologiepolitik kann sich dieser Einmischung der Bevölkerung ebenfalls nicht entziehen. In den siebziger und achtziger Jahren hat das Volk z. B. mehrmals über die Kernenergie abgestimmt, und 1998 über die Gentechnik.

Aus der Sicht Deutschlands werden die demokratischen Möglichkeiten, die das politische System der Schweiz bietet, manchmal als Idealfall betrachtet. Dabei wird aber nicht berücksichtigt, unter welchen Bedingungen diese Möglichkeiten wahrgenommen werden. Die Kampagnen vor einer Abstimmung – und dies