

The Emperor's New Clothes?

Assessing the Democratic Value of the European Citizens' Initiative

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) has long been accused of suffering from a democratic deficit. One of the latest reforms introduced with a view to tackling this deficit is the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), an instrument which allows citizens to present legislative proposals provided that they have collected one million signatures from several Member States. The establishment of the ECI has been accompanied by buoyant democratic rhetoric by EU leaders for enabling, for the first time, EU citizens to participate directly in shaping EU policy. *But, does the ECI really help enhance democracy in the EU?*

Although this question has attracted considerable scholarly attention, our knowledge about the democratic value of the ECI remains limited. This is due, first, to the fragmented character of the criteria against which the democratic value of the ECI is discussed and, second, to the absence of systematic empirical research. This thesis addresses both these shortcomings. Drawing on political equality and autonomy as core normative democratic principles, I derive three criteria which aim to provide a comprehensive set of evaluative standards: equal and inclusive participation, openness and inclusive group access to the agenda, and impact on the legislative agenda. Second, I study how well the ECI meets each of these criteria over three empirical chapters. I draw on different fields of literature for each level of analysis and use a

multi-method approach, which combines quantitative analysis, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and case-studies.

Synthesizing the findings, this study informs the debate about the democratic value of the ECI and its capacity to enhance the democratic fabric of the EU. But beyond case specifics, the thesis generates insights for understanding the possibilities and limits of democratizing the EU by offering citizens opportunities to participate beyond, and in addition to, representative channels.

Jury:

Prof. Alexander H. Trechsel, University of Lucerne / formerly EUI (Supervisor)
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Bio

Anna-Angela Kandyla holds a BA in Communication and Mass Media from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and an MA in Political Behaviour from the University of Essex. Anna's research interests include the relationship between political participation, democracy and governance at the national and European levels.