

The Finnish Citizens' Initiative – Towards Inclusive Agenda-Setting?

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Introduction

Since 1 March 2012, 50.000 Finnish citizens eligible to vote have had a right to make legislative proposal that the Finnish Parliament (*Eduskunta*) will discuss and decide on. The Finnish citizens' initiative (CI) is a so-called indirect or agenda initiative because it does not lead to a popular vote. In the literature, agenda initiatives have been contrasted with so-called full-scale initiatives, which lead to a (non-binding or binding) popular vote (Setälä & Schiller 2012). Agenda initiatives exist in a variety of European democracies, such as Austria (since 1963), Spain (since 1978), Poland (since 1997), and, more recently, the Netherlands since 2006. At the European level, the European CI was adopted as part of the Lisbon Treaty in 2012. This shows that CIs, especially agenda initiatives, have become popular direct-democratic instruments also outside the US, where initiatives and referendums have long traditions at the State level. The 'participatory revolution' since the 1960s spurred interest in more direct forms of involvement that are issue-based and unrelated to party politics (Inglehart 1977; Kaase 1984; Norris 2002). In general, support for direct democracy has increased around the World, including countries like Finland (Dalton et al. 2001; Donovan & Karp 2006; Bengtsson & Christensen 2016). Agenda initiatives can be regarded as cautious steps towards increased citizen involvement (Jäske 2017), but the impacts of this move are not well understood. For this reason, it is important to study how agenda initiatives affect the functioning of the democratic system.

This paper contributes to this research agenda by examining the impact of the Finnish CI on inclusion, which is a central normative goal in democratic theory. While many theoretical arguments suggest that such participatory reforms ought to increase the inclusiveness by activating new groups of citizens, these propositions have rarely been tested empirically, especially at the national level. We study the impact of the CI with the help of the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) (Verba et al. 1995; Brady et al. 1995), which collects central explanations for why people do *not* take part in politics and hereby allows us to examine the characteristics of those who used the CI. In particular, we examine the impact of socio-economic resources and civic skills, psychological political engagement and recruitment networks on the propensity to sign citizens' initiatives to determine whether the CI attracts people who

otherwise tend to be politically inactive. We do this with the help of the Finnish election survey (FNES2015), which is a cross-sectional survey conducted following the 2015 parliamentary elections that allows us to discern the characteristics of those who supported initiatives. The results suggest that the CI has increased democratic inclusion. Most noticeably, the CI attracts young citizens, who are otherwise often politically inactive. Furthermore, it is a relatively accessible form of participation since the Internet constitutes an important recruitment network.

The paper is structured as follows: The next section introduces the concept of inclusion and how CIs could potentially mobilize citizens according to CVM. Following this, we explore the design features and the early experience of the Finnish CI as a background to the study. Thereafter, we introduce the data, methods and variables used to examine our research questions. In the empirical analysis, we examine how well CVM can explain the propensity to sign CIs. The paper concludes with a discussion on whether and how the CI has enhanced the inclusiveness of the democratic system in Finland.

Citizens' initiatives and democratic inclusiveness

Inclusion is a key concept in modern democratic theory, and like other democratic theoretical concepts, it has a variety of interpretations. Robert Dahl (1989), for example, discusses inclusion in terms of who should be granted political rights. In this way, the problem of inclusion can be understood as more or less equal to the problem of the definition of the *demos*. Inclusion is also central in theories of deliberative democracy, which emphasize processes where political claims are judged by their merits. Habermas (1996, 359) describes the interaction between civil society and formal democratic institutions as follows: '[...]From the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere must, in addition, amplify the pressure of problems, that is, not only thematise them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes.' Many deliberative democrats, like Habermas, regard parliaments as key institutions because they allow public deliberation on different issues and arbitration of claims raised in civil society. Moreover, deliberative theorists (e.g. Dryzek 2009) have emphasized various institutional mechanisms which enable

transmission of the issues defined in the public sphere to the empowered spaces where decisions are made.

Although democrats tend to believe that social changes can be promoted through democratic means, current forms of representative democracy are not necessarily sufficient for those who emphasize the link between justice and democracy. Young (2000, 35) argues that “[...] formally democratic processes in societies with structural inequalities seem as likely to reinforce injustice as to promote greater justice.” Young (2000) famously analyses different mechanisms of exclusion that undermine the link between democratic procedures and justice, that is, external and internal exclusion. Young (2000, 54-55) argues that external exclusions are practices that keep some individuals out from the forums of decision-making, and that these kinds of exclusions occur in all democracies, despite formal equality of political rights. As examples of external exclusions, Young mentions back-door brokering, i.e. setting up self-appointed committees by the empowered, political campaigns dominated by moneyed interests and exclusive practices for public hearings and comments. Although specific institutional reforms may enhance the access of marginalized groups to the forums of public discussion and decision-making, Young points out that internal exclusion caused by structural inequalities will still emerge. Internal exclusions refer to exclusive dynamics in processes of public deliberation, for example, privileging certain modes of communication. Based on her analysis of patterns of internal exclusion, Young (2000, 172) concludes as follows: “Democratic process ought to encourage and enable the organizing of multiple and contending discourses, forms of expression and debate.”

Overall, inclusion can be enhanced by measures that support especially the marginalized groups to access and express their concerns within those forums where public decisions are discussed and made. Democratic systems should be further developed in order to enhance inclusion and capacity to deal with different interests raised in the civil society. This could call for institutional measures such as proportional representation, group representation, opportunities of citizen participation between elections such as CIs, as well as active support for the mobilization of marginalized groups who are not

otherwise politically active. In principle, CIs open the political agenda for novel viewpoints emerging from civil society rather than the political establishment. Therefore, they could potentially counteract patterns of exclusion by allowing the articulation of interests that would not otherwise be heard in decision-making. It is therefore important to assess the participatory equality of the CI empirically in order to determine the impact in terms of inclusion. Based on earlier studies, different expectations exist for the impact of the CI on inclusion. On one hand, it has been argued that providing new possibilities for participation might mobilize otherwise inactive citizens, thereby increasing democratic inclusiveness (Smith & Tolbert 2004, 2007; Zittel & Fuchs 2006). On the other hand, it might be mainly those who are already politically active who take advantage of the new possibilities, meaning the CI could exacerbate existing inequalities in political participation (Magleby 1984; Hooghe 1999).

Determining who have used the CI is an important step in assessing the impact of the agenda initiative on democratic inclusion in Finland. In parliamentary democracies, agenda initiatives seem to represent a feasible compromise between those who support the principle of parliamentary sovereignty and those who support the expansion of people's direct involvement in policy-making processes. Agenda initiatives provide citizens only with a form of discursive power or, more precisely, a power to influence the parliamentary decision-making agenda by proposing new legislation. However, because the numbers of signatures required for agenda initiatives are usually low compared to full-scale initiatives, the use of agenda initiatives seem to be more easily within the reach of marginalized groups. This effect is reinforced by the fact that agenda initiatives do not lead to a referendum, which means that substantial financial and organizational campaign resources are not necessarily required.

The unequal nature of political participation has long been a concern among political scientists (Lijphart 1997). Research on the inequality of political participation frequently rely on the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) developed by Verba et al. (1995) to explore reasons for why people do not take part in political activities and thereby exclude themselves from influencing political decisions. According to Verba et al. (1995, 15), there are three reasons why people do not take part in politics: 1)

because they can't, 2) because they don't want to, or 3) because nobody asked. Inequalities in participation are a cause for concern when they lead to representational distortions that means certain political positions are more likely to be communicated through participation (Verba et al. 1995, 466-470). In this sense, participatory inequalities increase political exclusion when people with certain characteristics are systematically left out from influential political discussions (Young 2000, 141).

The first reason focuses on abstention from involvement due to a lack of key socio-demographic resources and civic skills that facilitate participation. That resources matter for political participation is hardly a controversial assertion. Several comparative studies of political participation find that those who are politically active do not resemble the general population since they hold certain socio-demographic resources and characteristics that facilitate participation (Norris 2002; van Deth et al. 2007). Resources and skills have also been found to be central sources of participatory inequalities in Finland, although there are important differences depending on the type of participation under consideration (Bengtsson & Christensen 2009). Inequalities in the distribution of resources and skills may help explain differences in participation related to politically relevant characteristics such as age and gender (Verba et al. 1995, 472-473; Norris 2002, 29). Age, for example, does not necessarily cause participation, but it is a politically relevant characteristic since there are systematic differences in participation between age groups (Verba et al. 1995, 472). Younger citizens are often found to be less active in traditional political activities, although they are active in non-traditional forms of participation (Bengtsson & Grönlund 2005, 149; Bengtsson & Christensen 2016). In Finland, support for referendums has also been consistently stronger among young citizens (Bengtsson & Mattila 2009; Borg 2013), and they favour online forms of participation (Christensen et al. 2016). It should be a reason for concern when young citizens are excluded from influence since they do not make use of relevant possibilities for participation such as the CI (Milner 2010, 14-15). Education has a central role in CVM as a proxy for civic skills since educational attainment enhances basic skills that ease participation, provides information on political matters and helps to develop favourable attitudes such as a sense of civic responsibility (Verba et al. 1995, 305). Education has been linked to both traditional and non-traditional forms of

participation in Finland (Bengtsson & Christensen 2016, 2009) and in comparative studies (Marien et al. 2010). Inequalities in participation due to education attainment may be particularly worrisome since there are likely to be systematic differences in political preferences between those with low and high educational attainment (Verba et al. 1995, 514; Marien et al. 2010).

Verba et al. (1995) consider the first group of factors as central since they are earlier in the causal chain, and therefore less likely to be affected by political activity rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, they also note that the three factors interact to shape participation and the exact configuration of participatory factors differs for different activities (Verba et al. 1995, 16). An important contribution of CVM is that it specifies two other conditions for how they matter. The second reason focuses on psychological engagement in political matters and the extent to which individuals are interested in political matters and feel competent to make a difference when it comes to political processes. Factors such as political interest and internal political efficacy are consistently found to be important predictors for most kinds of political participation, also in Finland (Bengtsson & Grönlund, 2005; Bengtsson & Christensen 2009), but their relationship with political activity are often considered to be somewhat trivial given the reciprocal nature of the relationships (Brady et al. 1995, 271). Furthermore, while Verba et al. (1995, 472-473) see factors such as political interest as important participatory factors that can cause participation, they also point out that it is not politically relevant characteristics since it does not bias the message to the decision-makers as high political interest is not associated with particular political preferences. Hence, even if political interest affects participation, it is unproblematic for participatory equality as long as political outcomes remain unaffected. Nevertheless, psychological engagement calls attention to the fact that having resources does not equal political activity if the individual is not interested in using them for political purposes.

The final reason concerns involvement in relevant recruitment networks such as associations and organizations and the extent to which these act as a catalyst for individuals to take an active role. These networks differ in the degree of personal connection, the location in life space of the individual and the

demography of the networks (Verba a et al. 1995, 139). Nevertheless, a central prerequisite for most types of involvement is to be asked to be involved since even more individualized forms of participation depends on some collective agency. There are studies suggesting that campaigns for initiatives often depend on the backing of strong organized interests (Adams 2012, 44). Different kinds of networks are likely to play a central role for signing CIs since they are central for disseminating information on on-going collections of signatures in support of proposals. In order to support a proposal for an initiative, individuals need to be aware of the proposal and the possibility for supporting it, regardless of the level of civic resources and attitudes. In addition to traditional organizations, online networks may be particularly important considering the possibilities for sharing information online that the online platform for collecting signatures provides. For example, a Facebook group exists that provide information on on-going collections and what campaigns are about to run out of time for collecting the signatures. Such online campaigns may constitute central recruitment networks that even rival traditional networks such as political parties when it comes to the CI.

We here examine the extent to which signing CIs give otherwise marginalized and inactive groups a voice in political matters by examining the characteristics associated with using the CI and signing a proposal.ⁱ Based on the work outlined above, we have established that certain characteristics are systematically associated with abstention from political action (low resources and civic skills, low psychological involvement in political matters, low involvement in relevant recruitment networks). By examining whether the same patterns are replicated for using the CI, we can determine whether the introduction of this possibility has increased inclusiveness by giving voice to marginalized groups. Based on the theory above, we examine the following three hypotheses concerning the mobilizing impact of the CI:

- H1:** *People low on socio-demographic resources and civic skills support CIs.*
- H2:** *People with low psychological engagement in political matters support CIs.*
- H3:** *People with low involvement in relevant recruitment networks support CIs.*

Before presenting the data and variables for our study, the following section outlines how the CI functions in Finland to provide some background for our study.

The design features and experience of a Citizens' initiative in Finland

The Committee preparing revisions of the Finnish Constitution proposed the adoption of an agenda initiative in 2010. Along with other constitutional amendments, the proposal for an initiative was passed by the required parliamentary (super)-majorities and the amended constitution was enacted March 2012. The constitutional amendment defined the number of citizens required to express their support for an initiative, which was set at 50000 citizens eligible to vote (about 1.2% of the total electorate). In addition, it stated that initiatives should pertain to legislation – this could mean proposals for changing or repealing existing laws or for entirely new laws. The initiative can be written in the format of a law or it can entail a proposal for the government to start a legislative process. The more detailed regulation of the initiative institution is defined in a separate law, also enacted in March 2012. Most importantly, the law regulates six-month time limit for the collection of expressions of support, as well as the format of an initiative and expressions of support.

The law defines the procedures and the technical requirements for online collection of signatures and specifically mentions the possibility of collecting signatures on an online platform provided by the Ministry of Justice, but other organizations were also allowed to develop independent platforms.ⁱⁱ The vast majority of expressions of support are nowadays collected on the governmental website www.kansalaisaloite.fi. Formal institutions of direct democracy have rarely been accompanied by online tools. To our knowledge, Finland and Latvia are the only countries in Europe that allow online signatures in national level CIs (Auers 2015; Bukovskis & Spruds 2015). This possibility potentially plays a central role in how CIs function in practice. Compared to canvassing and campaigning with pens and papers in public spaces, expressions of support are much easier to collect online. By enhancing the accessibility of the initiative instrument from the citizens' perspective and significantly reducing initiators' costs, the

online collection system potentially makes it possible for smaller and more marginalized civic groups to reach the signature thresholds for their political and societal causes.

Overall, the law on the CI allows flexibility in terms of the contents and the format of an initiative. The law obliges the Finnish Parliament (*Eduskunta*) to deal with an initiative, but it is in the parliamentary discretion to decide whether to approve, amend, or reject any initiative. Moreover, the law does not regulate the parliamentary procedures on CIs. Some months before the introduction of the CI, changes were made to the parliamentary procedures stipulating that CIs should be dealt with like other law proposals and that initiators should have the right to be heard in the relevant committee. Parliament started to debate the first initiative concerning a ban of fur farming in April 2013. It was only at this point that the parliamentary procedures for initiatives became a subject of wider public discussion. The big issue was whether CIs should be given priority in committees, especially compared to legislative initiatives made by individual MPs. The fact is that individual MPs' initiatives tend to be 'buried' in committees – governmental proposals are prioritized to the extent that individual MPs' initiatives never make it to the committee agenda before the end of the parliamentary term.

Loud voices from civil society insisted on adequate procedures for initiatives – these views were backed by the justifications given for the constitutional change which suggested that a CI should be comparable with a law proposal by 100 members of Parliament (out of 200) rather than to those by individual MPs (Hallituksen esitys 60/2010 vp). However, some MPs and even the secretary-in-chief of the *Eduskunta* took a more critical stance on the idea of privileging CIs in this manner (Helsingin Sanomat 12.3.2013). However, none of the initiatives submitted to Parliament have been 'buried' in committees so far and they have all gained relatively swift and thorough proceedings in Parliament. A relevant committee has given a report on each initiative, and the reports have then been discussed and, apart from few exemptions, voted on at the plenary. As required by the parliamentary procedures, initiators have been heard by committees, and these committee hearings have been open to all MPs as well as to

the media. This kind of a publicity of committee work is a novel feature in the Finnish legislative system, which has served to increase the openness of legislative decision-making.

During the first four years of existence, the CI has been a fairly popular instrument among the civil society actors and individual citizens. Altogether 345 proposals for citizens' initiatives were launched on the website from the start until August 2015, and these initiatives gained more than 1.3 million signatures either on paper or online. Based on these early experiences with the CI we also know, however, that it is difficult to obtain sufficient support for proposals. A vast majority of the proposals come nowhere near fulfilling the requirements. Of the 345 proposals, 321 (93%), gathered less than 10000 signatures, and 155 (about 45%) collected less than 100 signatures. Only ten proposals for initiatives (2.9%) gathered the required 50000 signatures. This suggests that the CI is used for promoting a variety of topics that would not otherwise enter the public sphere since they are only backed by small minorities.

Early experiences with the CI in Finland show that proposals for initiatives concern a variety of topics. In Fig. 1, we report the percentagewise distribution of proposals for initiatives and signatures by policy area. Because various categorisations of policy areas exist, we have built ours on earlier research on initiative and referendum topics (Braunstein 2004, 103; Boehmke 2005) with some modifications.ⁱⁱⁱ

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

About 49% of the proposals concerned three policy areas: "Health, welfare and housing", "Civil liberties, civil rights and law & order", and "Government and political processes". Most signatures have been given for proposals within two policy areas, since "Health, welfare and housing" and "Civil liberties, rights and punishments" account for about half of the signatures (50%). However, proposals concerning

“Government and political processes” have not succeeded in gathering a similar number of signatures, indicating that the broader public considers these issues less salient.^{iv}

Furthermore, the direct legislative impact of the CI has so far been limited. In the first two years of the existence of the CI, Parliament made decisions on eight initiatives.^v They have generally concerned changes to existing legislation rather than completely new legislation. Some issues, such as the initiative to make Swedish a voluntary language subject in schools, are related to long-standing cleavages in Finnish society. Most of these “successful” initiatives seem to concern value politics rather than left-right issues that align to socio-economic cleavages.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

So far, only one initiative, on gender-equal marriage legislation, has gained support in the plenary vote. This initiative was immensely popular and gathered the required 50000 signatures within a few hours, and it received a lot of public and media attention during the decision-making process. Some other initiatives (e.g. the one on energy certificates) have had indirect impact on legislation, but the overall picture is similar to other European experiences since the CI so far resulted in few legislative changes (see Schiller & Setälä 2012, 248-249). Nevertheless, the political impact of initiatives is not limited to legislative changes, since they have also been influential in increasing awareness of specific issues and influencing citizens’ and representatives’ attitudes on them.

To sum up, the early experiences of the Finnish CI suggest that it has served as a channel to test ideas and raise awareness on questions that tend to be underrepresented in the parliamentary decision-making agenda. Since the parliamentary agenda largely is defined by political parties, aligned by traditional cleavage structures and a tradition of consensual decision-making (Karvonen 2014), issues such as civil rights and liberties as well as issues of public morality may be neglected. The direct

legislative impact of the CI has been limited, but as previous research has shown, the impact of the CI and similar institutions does not necessarily depend on legislative changes, but more on improving the process of decision-making (Lind and Tyler 1988; Christensen et al. 2015). Public perceptions of the CI also mirror its positive uptake in Finnish civil society, since about 83% of respondents in FNES215 agree that the CI has had a positive impact on the functioning of Finnish democracy. This is not surprising considering the stable support for direct democracy in Finland over time, since 64-70% of the population have supported the use of national referendums for making important decisions in the four latest cross-sectional election surveys going back to 2003 (Bengtsson & Christensen 2016; Borg 2013, 53).

In the following, we present the data and variables for examining our hypotheses on the impact of the CI on democratic inclusiveness.

Data and variables

We use the Finnish National Election Study (FNES2015) to examine our three hypotheses on whether the CI has enhanced inclusion of marginalized groups in the society. This consists of a cross-sectional representative survey with 1602 respondents (some are excluded in the analyses due to missing values), which was collected following national parliamentary elections in April 2015.

Discerning the relationships between the explanatory factors and the propensity for political actions such as signing CIs is by no means an easy task (Verba et al. 1995, 473). However, we here follow the traditional approach within the literature on political participation and use bivariate and multiple regression techniques (Norris 2002; van Deth et al. 2007; Bengtsson & Christensen 2009; Milner 2010). These techniques allow us to identify the independent contributions of each of the independent variables that purport to explain the variation in the dependent variable. Since the dependent variable is coded dichotomously, we use logistic regression analysis with robust standard errors to establish how well the independent variables predict supporting proposals and thereby assess our hypotheses (Powers & Xie 2008; Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen 2017).^{vi} The choice of method entails that we refrain

from examining how the independent variables interact to shape participation in signing CIs in detail, which would require more complex approaches such as structural equation modelling. Nevertheless, to get a rudimentary idea of the interplay between variables, we gradually increase the complexity of the analyses. We start with bivariate analyses, before we turn to multiple regression analyses, where we introduce the independent variables in four successive steps in accordance with the logic of the CVM. During the analyses, the data are weighted to ensure representativeness when it comes to key socio-demographic characteristics. The following shortly explains the coding of variables. All variables are coded to vary between 0 and 1 to simplify comparisons of the effects. Descriptive information on all variables is in Appendix 1.

The dependent variable for our study is the extent to which people have supported proposals for CIs. This is operationalized with a question asking respondents whether they had supported proposals for CIs at the national level. The answers are divided into four categories: 1. *Did not and will not do*; 2. *Did not, but could do so*; 3. *Signed 1-2 citizens' initiatives*; and 4. *Signed at least 3 citizens' initiatives*. By coding this variable as a dichotomy indicating whether the respondent indicates having supported CIs, we can explore who took advantage of the possibility to signing in support of proposals for CIs.

We include three sets of independent variables corresponding to the three factors outlined by Verba et al. (1995). Previous studies have operationalized these in several different ways (Verba et al. 1995; Brady et al. 1995; Bengtsson & Christensen 2009). We here aim to include the most relevant aspects for the current purposes. For socio-economic resources and civic skills, we include age, gender, education and employment. These variables directly or indirectly measure the socio-economic status of the individual and thereby allow us to examine whether the CI attracts citizens who tend to be politically marginalized due to a lack of key resources (Verba et al. 1995). Age and gender are basic socio-demographic characteristics that have been found to be systematically related to the propensity for political involvement, whereas education and full-time employment are more direct measures of socio-economic status that function as proxies for civic skills.^{vii} The aim is here to discern whether CI attracts

people who are otherwise less involved in political matters (Young citizens, females, people with lower education, and people without full-time employment). Age is measured by subtracting the year of birth from 2015, and the result is divided by 100 to make the impact broadly comparable to other independent variables coded 0-1. Gender is a dichotomous variable where females are coded as 0 and males as 1. For education, the variable measures the highest level of educational attainment measured with 7 categories (1=highest education). Employment is also dichotomous where those with full-time employment are coded 1 and everyone one else (part-time employment, unemployed, studying, retired, or other) were coded 0.

For psychological political engagement, we include two standard measures of this aspect: political interest and internal efficacy. We here examine whether the CI attracts people with low interest/efficacy to mobilize otherwise unengaged citizens. It is here potentially problematic that there as noted may be a reciprocal relationship (Brady et al., 1995). However, these traits are formed in early adulthood and remain relatively stable over the life course from then on. Furthermore, studies show that they are unaffected by involvement in signing CIs (Christensen et al., 2015). Political interest is measured with a standard question where respondents indicate their level of interest on a four-point Likert scale, while internal efficacy is measured with answers to the question “sometimes politics seems so complicated that I can’t really understand what is going on” on a four-point Likert scale.

For recruitment networks, we include two traditional types of networks that are likely to be of primary importance when it comes to being asked to sign CIs: Involvement in political parties and involvement in other voluntary associations. Both are coded as dichotomies (1=yes). We also include Internet usage since this is likely to be important. While the Internet is not traditionally considered an important recruitment network, it is likely to be of importance since the collection of signatures predominantly takes place online. In this sense, it is interesting to see how this more accessible network compares to the traditional recruitment networks. This is measured with a question on how frequently the respondent uses the Internet.

Analysis

Before testing our hypotheses, we show an overview on the use of the CI in Finland according to the FNES2015. Table 2 shows the distribution of the answers to the question on use of the CI.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

About one third (35.0%) have supported a proposal for a CI at least once and 5.5% have done so three or more times. There is some risk for social desirability bias leading people to answer in the affirmative even when they have not signed an initiative, and some respondents may have confused signing CIs with more informal petitions. For the 65% who have not signed any initiatives yet, 45% say they are willing to do so but have not done so yet, while about 20% say they would not under any circumstances sign an initiative. Despite this sizeable minority unwilling to use the CI, signing initiatives has become a popular political activity, especially considering that the percentage active exceeds involvement within the last four years in more traditional political activities such as political party activism (10%), contacting politicians (21%) and peaceful demonstrations (8%). This suggests that the CI has been a successful addition to the political repertoire in Finland.

To examine our hypotheses, we performed a series of regression analyses. To be able to discern the interplay between the independent variables in shaping the propensity for signing CIs, we gradually increase the complexity of the models. In Fig. 2, we first show bivariate regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals that indicate the strengths of the relationships between the independent variables and supporting CIs.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

All factors have significant relationships with signing CIs, indicating clear differences between citizens who use the possibilities and those who refrain. The results are mixed for the first group of variables. There is a strong negative linkage between age and signing CIs, which entails that younger citizens are more likely to do so. Women are also more likely to sign, which shows that the CI mobilizes these groups of citizens. However, we also see that people with higher education and full-time employment are also more likely to have signed at least one CI, meaning people with higher socio-economic status also make use of the possibility.

For psychological political engagement, there are positive linkages, which show that higher levels of political interest and efficacy are both connected to having signed a CI. For recruitment networks, we find a similar pattern since those engaged in political parties and other associations are more likely to have signed. However, it is here interesting to note that the effect of Internet use is much stronger, suggesting that this may indeed be the most important recruitment network in this case.

As already noted, these variables are likely to be interdependent and these results are therefore insufficient to discern the root causes of signing CIs. We therefore performed a series of multiple logistic regression analyses to ascertain the independent contributions of the independent variables, the results of which are shown in Table 3. We first examine the impact of socio-economic resources and skills in M1, add psychological involvement in M2, recruitment networks in M3 before combining them all in the final model M4.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

M1 concerns the socio-economic resources and skills and most results are consistent with the bivariate results with the exception of full-time employment, which loses its importance. This shows that the enhanced use of the CI for those who are in full-time employment found above can be put down to differences in age, gender and education.

M2 adds political interest and efficacy to the previous results. Here internal efficacy loses significance, but otherwise no major changes occur. This shows that the bivariate differences for internal efficacy are most likely due to differences in resources and skills rather than a separate effect, although it should be observed that the effect is only marginally insignificant. M3 includes recruitment networks rather than the psychological variables, and here involvement in other voluntary associations loses significance, meaning the bivariate differences are most adequately attributed to other factors, whereas both party activism and Internet use maintains their positive associations.

M4 combines these results in a final analysis of all factors. The most interesting change as a result is that education loses significance when including all factors simultaneously. While this does not necessarily mean that educational differences are irrelevant, it shows that the effect of education is channelled through both psychological political involvement and recruitment networks.^{viii} To demonstrate what the results entail, we in figure 3 show the developments in predicted probabilities of signing CIs for each of the variables.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT THERE]

As can be seen, most results suggest that the CI does reasonably well to attract people otherwise less involved politically. This is clearly the case for young citizens, who are much more likely to have signed CIs but women are also more likely than men to have taken part when considering other factors. As concerns education, the differences are less pronounced, and even if educational differences

materialize indirectly through political engagement and networks, it is remarkable that education does not have stronger direct effect. This finding indicates that it is possible to compensate participatory inequalities caused by education through other means. For political engagement, those with high political interest remain more likely to sign, whereas internal efficacy only matters indirectly. Finally, political parties are important recruitment networks, but even more important is Internet usage, which shows that signing CIs is a reasonably accessible form of participation not reserved for those who are members of particular networks or organizations.

Discussion of the results

The rationale behind CIs is to open up the political agenda-setting process to other actors than established political parties and thereby to enhance inclusion in political systems. The Finnish CI has become a widely used channel for political participation and has given all citizens the possibility to test the support for their ideas in the public sphere. About 1/3 of the electorate has signed one or more proposals, which makes it a popular political activity on par or better than more traditional activities. Nevertheless, even if the CI enhances citizens' access to the political agenda-setting process, there is a risk that it perpetuates rather than alleviates existing inequalities in participation by activating already well represented groups (Brady et al. 1995; Verba et al. 1995; Young 2000; Marien et al. 2010). We therefore examined the extent to which the CI has boosted democratic inclusiveness. Based on CVM, we examined three hypotheses concerning the impact of the CI on participatory inequalities.

The first hypothesis concerned how socio-economic resources and civic skills affect the propensity of signing the CI. The results were here encouraging since they suggested that inequalities when it comes to socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes were slight, and the CI even activated some otherwise marginalized groups. This was most clearly the case for younger citizens, who were much more likely to have signed CIs. Since the participation of younger citizens has been a central worry for several representative democracies (Milner 2010), this constitutes an important contribution to

increasing political equality. When young citizens are socialized into being active citizens at an early age, there is a greater chance that they continue to be involved, as they grow older.

Our second hypotheses concerned psychological political engagement, and the results here showed that the CI does not manage to mobilize people with lower political interest or efficacy. This result is unsurprising considering the reciprocal nature of the relationship between these attitudes and political action (Brady et al. 1995). This is less of a worry from a democratic perspective since participatory inequalities due to low interest do not necessarily equate representative distortions, as long as the level of interest is not connected to specific policy positions and/or is tied to systematic resource inequalities (Verba et al. 1995, 527). Nevertheless, the results show that increasing psychological political engagement remains a central prerequisite for increasing political equality.

The third and final hypothesis concerned the impact of recruitment networks. Here we found that political parties are important for mobilizing people to supporting initiatives, whereas involvement in other forms of associations appears to be largely irrelevant. However, Internet use was also a consistent and strong predictor of supporting CIs, which shows that the CI is a relatively accessible form of participation. Supporting CIs does not require paying membership fees or having time for organizational meetings and events, which are often seen as major barriers to popular engagement that contribute to existing participatory inequalities (Verba et al. 1995, 514-515). The CI is accessible to everyone with an Internet access.

It is important to note that age and Internet remained strong predictors even when examined simultaneously. Hence the involvement of youths cannot solely be ascribed to them being more avid Internet users (or indeed any of the other factors included in the models), nor can the importance of the Internet be restricted to young citizens. Both age and Internet use works as separate mobilizing factors, which suggests that the CI helps mobilize youth and remains a relatively accessible form of participation for all since most of the adult population has connection to the Internet and tools for online identification.

Overall, our results show that the CI seems to have helped mobilize certain marginalized groups and articulate their interests in the parliamentary arena, and in this way, it has counteracted patterns of external exclusion in the Finnish parliamentary democracy. The CI appears to be an egalitarian mode of participation, even if it does not equal out all existing inequalities in participation (Lijphart 1997). While this suggests that the CI can help empower marginalized groups, these findings also come with some potential downsides. It should be kept in mind that even if institutional reforms such as the CI empower some groups, they may at the same time marginalize other groups, in this case older citizens and those who are less avid Internet users. This shows the importance of developing multiple channels of access that allow multiple and contending discourses, forms of expression and debate since different participatory practices appeal to different social groups (Young 2000, 172; Christensen et al. 2016).

Furthermore, while the present findings suggest that the Finnish CI has counteracted patterns of external exclusion in political decision-making; it must be kept in mind that these patterns may well change with the institutionalization of the new democratic instrument. Since agenda initiatives only provide citizens with agenda-setting powers, the proper functioning of the Finnish CI hinges on the willingness of the parliamentarians to consider the initiatives carefully (Christensen et al. 2015). While this has generally been the case so far, the *Eduskunta* has complained over the low quality of some legislative proposals that made it to Parliament as citizens' initiatives (*Eduskunta*, 2017). While these complaints may be justified at times, they also entail a risk that discourses that do not conform to certain prevailing norms are excluded from decision-making in Parliament. This shows that, in order to understand the impact of the CI, it is also necessary to study internal exclusion (Young, 2000), and the extent to which certain modes of communication or formats of initiatives are privileged over others. To this end, examining parliamentary procedures and practices for handling initiatives is paramount.

While this study does not make it possible to settle conclusively what aspects of the Finnish CI make it a relatively successful kind of democratic innovation, it seems clear that the accessibility of the instrument facilitated by the website www.kansalaisaloite.fi is a major part of the story. By making it

feasible to launch proposals and collect signatures, the website makes the instrument a usable tool even for citizens who do not possess the backing of traditional organizations.

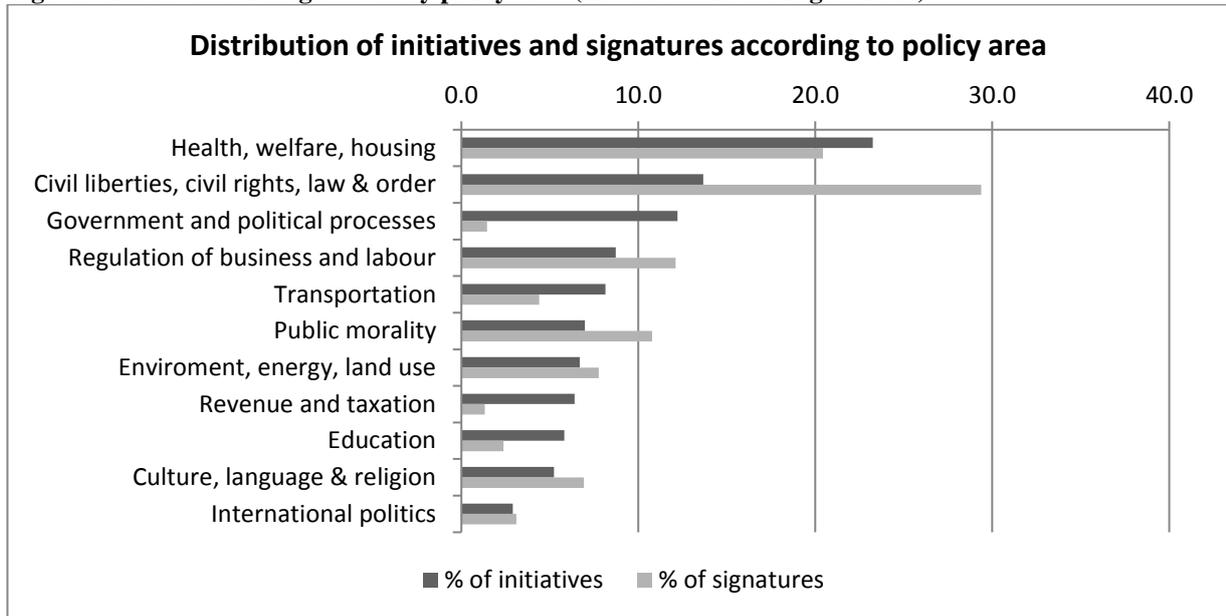
Appendix 1: Descriptive information on variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	VIF
<i>Dependent variable</i>						
Signed CIs	1569	0.34	0.47	0.00	1.00	N/A
<i>Independent variables</i>						
<i>Socio-economic resources and civic skills</i>						
Age	1587	0.51	0.20	0.18	0.94	1.65
Gender	1587	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00	1.04
Education	1583	0.48	0.32	0.00	1.00	1.36
Employment	1587	0.32	0.46	0.00	1.00	1.14
<i>Psychological political engagement</i>						
Political interest	1587	0.61	0.29	0.00	1.00	1.32
Internal political efficacy	1553	0.36	0.32	0.00	1.00	1.21
<i>Recruitment networks</i>						
Associational involvement	1584	0.42	0.49	0.00	1.00	1.17
Party activism	1528	0.10	0.30	0.00	1.00	1.12
Internet use	1586	0.71	0.38	0.00	1.00	1.69

Note: Unweighted data.

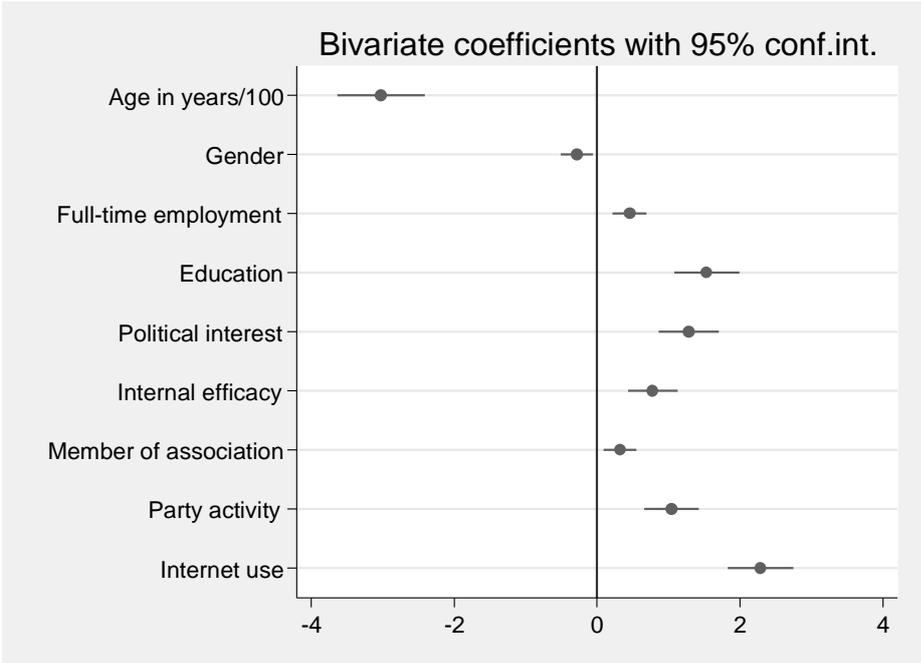
Figures

Figure 1 Initiatives and signatures by policy area (initiatives ended August 2015)



Source: Own classification based on data from www.kansalaisaloite.fi.

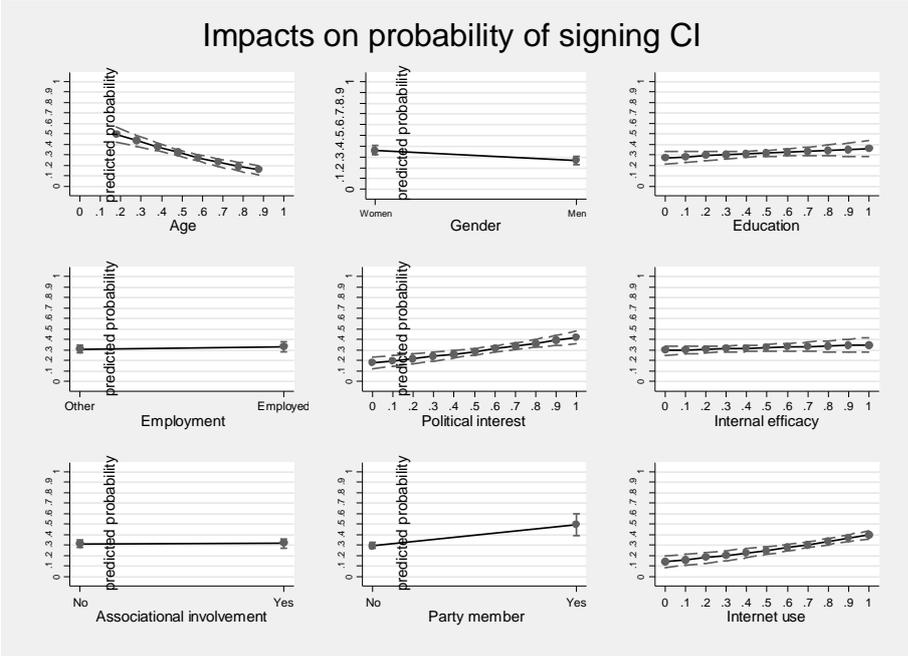
Figure 2 Bivariate connections to having signed citizens' initiatives, logistic regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals



Source: FNES2015.

Note: Figure shows coefficients with 95% confidence intervals from separate bivariate logistic regressions of the variable in question on signing citizens' initiatives. Weighted data.

Figure 3 Predicted probabilities for signing citizens' initiatives



Source: FNES2015.

Note: Figure shows marginal effects of the significant variables in model 2 in Table 3. Weighted data.

Tables

Table 1 Outcomes for citizens' initiatives with decisions

Aim	Date collection started	Number of signatures	Plenary decision	Plenary votes	Date of decision (1st reading)
Ban fur-farming in Finland	<i>13.05.2012</i>	<i>69,381*</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>36-146</i>	<i>13.06.2013</i>
A fairer copyright legislation	<i>23.01.2013</i>	<i>51,801</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>27-147</i>	<i>24.10.2014</i>
Make Swedish voluntary subject in schools	<i>04.03.2013</i>	<i>61,306</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>48-134</i>	<i>06.03.2015</i>
Gender neutral marriage legislation	<i>19.03.2013</i>	<i>166,851</i>	<i>Approved</i>	<i>105-92</i>	<i>28.11.2014</i>
Energy certificate for houses	<i>11.04.2013</i>	<i>62,211</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>NO VOTE</i>	<i>10.06.2014</i>
Harder punishment for drunk driving	<i>17.08.2013</i>	<i>62,835</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>NO VOTE</i>	<i>10.03.2015</i>
Change laws for child delivery hospitals	<i>10.04.2014</i>	<i>66,797</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>33-139</i>	<i>27.11.2015</i>
Right for nursing staff to refuse to assist in terminating life	<i>23.05.2014</i>	<i>67,547</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>33-136</i>	<i>04.12.2015</i>

Source: Own classification based on data from www.kansalaisaloite.fi.

Note: *The collection of signatures started before the launch of www.kansalaisaloite.fi so most signatures were collected on paper.

Table 2 Distribution of supporting citizens' initiatives

Signed citizens' initiative	N	Percent
Has not and will not sign	317	20.0
Has not signed but is willing to do so	714	45.0
Signed 1-2 citizens' initiatives	468	29.5
Signed at least 3 initiatives	87	5.5
Total	1586	100.0

Source: FNES2015

Note: Weighted data. Question phrasing: *Did you sign citizens' initiatives at the national level?*

Table 3 Multivariate logistic regressions examining factors explaining whether or not respondents signed citizens' initiatives

	M1			M2			M3			M4			
	Coeff	Robust SE	OR										
Socio-demographic resources and civic skills													
<i>Age</i>	-2.73	(0.33)***	0.07	-3.44	(0.36)***	0.03	-1.80	(0.40)**	*	0.17	-2.39	(0.41)***	0.09
<i>Gender</i>	-0.33	(0.12)**	0.72	-0.47	(0.13)***	0.62	-0.36	(0.13)**	0.70	-0.46	(0.13)**	0.63	
<i>Full-time employment</i>	0.14	(0.13) ^{NS}	1.15	0.15	(0.13) ^{NS}	1.17	0.08	(0.13) ^{NS}	1.08	0.09	(0.14) ^{NS}	1.10	
<i>Education</i>	1.18	(0.25)***	3.25	0.63	(0.28)*	1.87	0.74	(0.28)**	2.09	0.41	(0.30) ^{NS}	1.50	
Psychological political engagement													
<i>Political interest</i>				1.51	(0.28)***	4.53				1.21	(0.29)***	3.35	
<i>Internal political efficacy</i>				0.37	(0.21) ^{NS}	1.44				0.25	(0.22) ^{NS}	1.28	
Recruitment networks													
<i>Associational involvement</i>							0.08	(0.14) ^{NS}	1.08	0.01	(0.14) ^{NS}	1.01	
<i>Party involvement</i>							1.10	(0.21)**	*	3.01	0.84	(0.23)***	2.31
<i>Internet use</i>							1.52	(0.28)**	*	4.59	1.38	(0.28)***	3.99
<i>Constant</i>	0.20	(0.24) ^{NS}	1.23	-0.21	(0.25) ^{NS}	0.81	-1.33	(0.36)**	*	0.26	-1.53	(0.37)***	0.22
<i>N</i>	1565			1535			1504			1479			
<i>McFadden's Adj R2:</i>	0.067			0.096			0.102			0.117			
<i>AIC</i>	1.221			1.184			1.169			1.149			

Source: FNES2015.

Note: Entries are coefficients (B) from multivariate logistic regressions with robust standard errors (Robust SE) and odds ratios (OR). Significance (P): *p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001, NS not significant. Weighted data.

Notes

ⁱ While the initiators who launch initiatives occupies a central role, it is more interesting for the current purposes to examine the characteristics of the ostensibly broader set of people who sign initiatives, since this makes it possible to explore the extent to which using the CI appeals to different groups in society.

ⁱⁱ Signatures for the first initiative handed to Parliament, an initiative on banning fur farming, were mainly collected on paper because no online collection platforms were up and running when the initiative was launched. Partly as a response to the slow preparation of the government-run website, a service named *Avoim Ministeriö* was developed by a group of activists and IT professionals, which also allows for crowdsourcing the content of initiatives (Christensen et al. 2015).

ⁱⁱⁱ We categorized proposals for initiatives from the adoption of the CI until August 2015 into the following 11 policy areas: Government and political process, Revenue and taxation, Public morality, Regulation of business and labor, Civil liberties, civil rights, law & order, Health, welfare, housing, Environment, energy, land use, Education, Transportation, International politics, Language, culture, religion.

^{iv} The categorisation into policy areas does not tell us what kinds of policies are promoted with initiatives. Proposals on regulation of business and labour may, for example, be in favour of businesses or employees.

^v At the time of writing, 16 initiatives have been or are being handled by Parliament, but still only one has been approved.

^{vi} The dependent variable is coded did not sign=0/signed=1 for the regression analyses. We verified whether the coding of the dependent variable affected the substantive findings by analysing multinomial logistic regression models with identical predictors but where the dependent variable kept the original coding. Since the substantial results were similar, we only display results from logistic regression models analysing the dichotomous dependent variable.

^{vii} We also tried to include factual political knowledge as an indicator for civic skills, but this only weakened the effect of education and did not improve the amount of variation explained by the models. We therefore only report results from the more parsimonious models that exclude factual political knowledge.

^{viii} This interpretation is verified by a path analysis using the GSEM command in Stata. The results here shows that while the direct effect is insignificant, there are significant indirect effects that work through political interest ($B=0.41$, $p<0.001$) and Internet use ($B=0.31$, $p<0.001$). The total effect of education is therefore positive and significant ($B=1.13$, $p<0.001$).

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