

DFG-Project “Recasting the role of citizens in foreign and security policy? Democratic innovations and changing patterns of interaction between European executives and citizens”

Participatory-deliberative processes in foreign and security policy: understandings, processes & ramifications

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Project description

For the last decade, European democracies have witnessed several instances of a previously unknown involvement of citizens in political issues with a global dimension. Politicians and members of national executives in Europe have started to actively engage citizens in policy- and decision-making processes in the field of foreign and security policy (FSP). In fact, some governments, as well as international organisations such as the European Union (EU), have been initiating dialogue and participation processes, aiming at a larger inclusion of civic organisations, scientific experts and, remarkably, ordinary citizens in FSP.

Our project investigates this change of the role of citizens in the field of FSP. More specifically, we reconstruct how and why national governments introduce democratic innovations (DIs) to this policy field, usually considered as being dominated by the executive. We assume that understandings of how relations between the executive and citizens should be organised, as held by ministerial elites in FSP, have changed in some countries during the last decade. These changes of the citizen’s role also have ramifications for the politics in FSP, notably the intra- and inter-ministerial processes of policy- and decision-making, as well as relations between the executive and legislative in this policy field.

We are particularly interested in specific processes of DIs: participatory-deliberative processes (PDP). PDPs are purported to engage citizens in deliberative modes of participation, geared towards influencing public policy-making. It is important to stress their specific character of involvement and participation, which is both direct and deliberative. PDPs encompass a considerable subset of initiatives within DIs and may be part of, or feature in, many such innovations. While there are also bottom-up initiatives, we only analyse PDPs that are implemented by executives in European countries.

This DFG-project expands and deepens our pre-study of the German case, and it draws on preliminary research on DIs in other European countries (funded by the internal funding line of the HSU).

Objectives

Our project is rooted in International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis, but operates at the intersection of IR, democratic theory, and participation research. It has three specific goals with pertaining research questions:

- First, we analyse and structure (change in) *understandings of executive-citizens interactions* in FSP as held by executives in Europe. How do executives in FSP perceive of (changes in) a) citizens' role in FSP; b) their relation to citizens; and c) the interactions deemed appropriate and desirable for policy- and decision-making in FSP?
- Second, we investigate if and how these understandings translate into *interaction practices and formats*, i.e., democratic innovations, by which executives alter and possibly deepen citizens' involvement in FSP. If so, how are DIs organised and in what ways are they (not) shaped by the understanding held?
- Third, we assess the *ramifications* these practices may have for the politics in FSP. How should these ramifications be evaluated according to the standards set by executives' understandings? But also, how should these ramifications be evaluated according to minimal standards derived from normative democratic and deliberative theory?

Empirical cases

In order to analyse why executive actors (do not) offer DIs, we apply a small-n and cross-national comparative method. We empirically map and theoretically conceptualise executive-citizens relations in FSP by comparing the cases of France, Germany, Poland, and the UK. All four countries are “heavyweights” in European politics and security, and thus particularly relevant for how executive-citizens relations are organised in the field of FSP. At the same time, they differ significantly in how they organise executive-citizens interactions in the form of various DIs.

First, we map DIs in France, Germany, UK and Poland and identify PDPs. As we investigate how elites' understandings of executive-citizens relations in FSP translate into actual interaction, we search for variation in terms of whether or not executives conduct DIs and in whether or not they provide PDPs in these innovations. On the one hand, we look at DIs which have been conducted over the last 10 years (2010-2020). In addition, we extend our analysis to future DIs which will take place during the course of the research project (from 2022).

After we have established which executive actors initiate DIs in foreign and security policy and which do not (and for what reasons, respectively), we analyse the empirical and normative ramifications of such processes, particularly paying attention to structural conditions in which a given executive acts.