When Winning Is Everything.
An Experimental Account of Determinants of Decision-Acceptance in Schools, in the General Public, and among Students of Political Science

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Abstract
The paper sets out to explore boundary conditions for process effects (that affected persons’ reactions towards authoritative decisions are affected by the way decisions are made). First, to find out whether decent authorities in search of acceptance for difficult decisions can gain from choosing the one or the other form of decision-making, we analyze the effects of different legitimate procedures for decision-making. Second, to address questions on how and when people learn to care about procedures, we pay special attention to a prime institution for learning societal norms – the public education system.

The paper reports findings from six experimental studies of the scenario type, four of which involves high-school students and their teachers, and two of which involve adult citizens, and political science undergraduates, respectively. In the scenarios, participants are confronted with different types of collective issues to be decided by a referendum, by elected representatives or by expert bureaucrats. Findings show that decision acceptance is almost exclusively determined by outcome favorability among high school students and their teachers. Outcome favorability is the prime determinant in also our samples of adult citizens and political science undergraduates, but in these groups, procedural considerations add significantly to decision-acceptance.
Introduction
Procedural considerations have been found to be remarkably important for peoples’ reaction towards authoritative decisions. While intuition would have it that outcome favorability – whether one’s preferences are fulfilled or not – is the prime determinant of reactions, numerous studies within the field of social justice research have shown that people care a lot about the way decisions are made. Provided that decision-making procedures are perceived to be fair, there are good chances that affected individuals will be willing to accept unfavorable decisions (for reviews of the literature, see Lind & Tyler 1988; Tyler et al. 1997; Ambrose 2002; Tyler 2006; MacCoun 2006).

Social justice research presents a number of reasons for why people care about fair procedures: because they show that decision-makers can be trusted (Brockner 2002); because they signal to individuals that they are respected by decision-makers (Tyler & Lind 1992; Tyler 1994; Tyler, Degoy & Smith 1996); because it is a moral right fulfilled (Folger 1998; Miller 2001); and because of the instrumental reason that they will lead to fair decisions and possibly increase chances for individuals to receive a favorable outcome (Thibaut & Walker 1975). The importance of fair procedures can also be expressed within a rational framework. In such terms what happens is that people have preferences about how outcomes are generated, and when fulfilled these preferences generate procedural utility (Frey, Benz & Stutzer 2004; Frey & Stutzer 2005).

The identification of what is often called “the fair process effect” is potentially of practical importance (e.g. Klosko 2000). If government authorities can learn to make controversial decisions according to fair procedures there would seem to be good chances that citizens will accept the outcomes willingly. However, given the complexities of social interactions, we cannot expect fair procedures to be a panacea for all problems related to authoritative decision-making. An important boundary condition is provided by recent research on fairness heuristic theory, which argue that procedural consideration are less important in situations in which people can evaluate distributive aspects of the outcome in itself. Put simply, when individuals know which outcome that is fair from a distributive point of view, they care little about how the decision was made (Lind 2001; Van den Bos & Lind 2002; Van den Bos 2005; cf. Mullen and Skitka 2006; Esaiasson 2007). Moreover, looking at real life experiences, it should alert our critical thinking that public dissatisfaction with government performance is widespread throughout the Western world (e.g. Dalton 2004). If procedures are ever important for evaluations of government performance, this means by implication that well-intentioned democratic government authorities fail miserably in the way they make decisions. On balance, it would seem likely that in many situations willingness to accept authoritative decisions are first and foremost decided by the received outcome.¹

This paper sets out to further our understanding of boundary conditions for when and how procedural considerations are important for decision acceptance. It does so by developing on two observations regarding procedural justice research.

Our first observation is that studies on procedural justice typically compare procedures that are clearly fair with procedures that are clearly unfair (people are allowed to voice their

¹ On the normative level, political theorists argue that formally fair procedures may well lead to unfair outcomes, and that, hence, procedures alone cannot provide moral obligations to accept unfavorable decisions (Miller 1999).
concern or are not allowed to speak at all; decisions are thoroughly motivated or not motivated at all, and so forth). This obviously makes sense if the purpose is to demonstrate that people react against unfair forms of decision-making (and indeed there is ample evidence that we do). However, it cannot be deduced from these studies that governments in search of ways to make citizens accept unfavorable decisions will be helped by choosing the one or the other legitimate procedure for decision-making.

More precisely, our study will analyze the following situation: A decent democratic polity is about to make a decision in a controversial collective issue. No matter which decision that is taken large number of citizens will have their preferences denied. From the literature we can assume that it will lower acceptance if the decision is made according to unfair principles where people have no say over the outcome. However, since our interest is not to demonstrate that democratic rule is superior to such authoritarian rule, we want to find out whether the choice of one or the other legitimate form of decision-making affects peoples’ willingness to accept the decision in question. Specifically, we will analyze what difference it makes for decision-acceptance if the decision is made by affected individuals themselves in referenda, by elected representatives, or by expert bureaucrats with delegated authority to make binding decisions.

Our second observation is that procedural justice literature rarely addresses learning processes. On the face of things, it would seem that it requires a high level of cognitive sophistication to start caring about how decisions were made. However, since fair procedure effects have been found in widely different contexts (e.g. Cohn, White & Sanders 2000; Price et al. 2001) it might well be that the learning process is easy, or even intuitive.

To begin address this question we will pay special attention to a prime institution for learning societal norms – the public education system. How important are procedural considerations when young citizens and their teachers decide together in matters of common interest? As a point of reference, we have conducted corresponding studies with a sample of general citizens, and with a group of individuals who have been trained to think explicitly about procedures – political science undergraduates. This design allows us to test the empirical support for three simple models of learning processes: A model of easy learning is supported if all groups – high school students as well as teachers, “citizens in general” and political science undergraduates – consider procedures when deciding whether to accept controversial decisions. A model of traditional life-cycle learning – we learn as we get older – is supported if procedures are considered by only the three groups of adults. And a model of advanced learning is supported if procedures are considered by mainly political science undergraduates.

Throughout the paper, the effects of outcome favorability – the intuitively most important determinant of decision-acceptance – will be used as a contrast. Outcome favorability is a measure of preference fulfillment. We assume that people know what decision they prefer, and that the outcome is more favorable if the decision goes their way. We are agnostic on why people hold their preference; it may be based on calculations of self-interest, and it may be based on ideas of distributive fairness (e.g. Tyler et al. 1997).

In what follows, we first develop on key concepts “forms of decision-making”, “learning processes” and “decision-acceptance”. Thereafter we report findings from a series of scenario experiments (meaning that participants are asked to imagine themselves to be in a specified situation) involving high school students, teachers, adult citizens and political science undergraduates, respectively. In the scenarios, participants are confronted with a collective
matter to be decided by a referendum, by elected representatives or by expert bureaucrats. We end by discussing implications of our findings.

Theory
Forms of Decision-Making
It is crucial to note that social justice theory is subjective in its nature. It is perceived judgments on procedural fairness and distributive fairness that guides individuals’ reactions towards authoritative decisions (Lind & Tyler 1988). The relationship between actual procedures of decision-making and procedural perceptions is considered important as such, but the main causal factor is individuals’ perceptions on how the decision was made. To illustrate the point, influential social justice scholar Kees Van den Bos (2005) suggest that the term “fair process effect” should be reserved for reactions that follow from judgment on perceived procedural fairness, whereas effects of actual conditions (events) on procedural fairness judgments should be labeled “voice effects”. Notably, this admirable effort to obtain terminological unity does not include a term for the total effect of actual conditions on reactions towards authoritative decisions. It is this total effect of actual conditions (forms of decision-making) on decision-acceptance that interests us in this paper.

The specifics of decision-making procedures vary by type of decision to make. The decision of interest in this paper deals with policy making; a collective of people will decide in matters that will affect all members of the collective: What rules shall restrict the freedom of individuals, and how shall limited resources be distributed?

Democratic authorities can decide in matters of policy making according to three basic forms of decision-making: (i) affected people can decide themselves in a referendum; (ii) elected representatives can decide on behalf of those who elected them; and (iii) expert bureaucrats can decide on authority delegated from elected representatives. Within each form of decision-making variations are plentiful – varieties of electoral systems for choosing representatives is an obvious example – but our intention is to discuss whether these basic forms of decision-making affects acceptance of authoritative decisions. All of them have procedural characteristics that make them legitimate.²

From the idea of direct democracy follows that affected persons should accept the outcome of a referendum because they have been personally involved in the making of the decision; personal involvement should foster a sense of shared responsibility for the decision made (Holmes 1995:196-7; Hermansson 2003; Teorell 2006; cf. Pateman 1970; MacPherson 1977;). In comparison to the normative literature, empirical evaluations of the effects of referendum on decision-acceptance are scarce. Existing evidence is hardly conclusive, but seems to speak in favor of the positive effects expected by theorists (Lupia & Matsusaka 2004).³

² Gilljam, Esaiasson & Lindholm (2007) analyze variations within respective form of decision-making.
³ According to theorists, decision-acceptance is not the only, and not even the prime, consequence that follow from referenda and other forms of direct democracy. Rather, the main emphasis has been on personal development and on development on citizen civicness (for a list of key references, se Teorell 2006). While discussing the pros of referendum and other forms of direct democracy, it should be mentioned that is a controversial form of democracy. Gilljam (2003) identifies no more than eleven practical objections to direct
The main reason why affected persons should accept decisions made by elected representatives is that they have given their consent at the time of the election, and that they will be asked to consent again at the time of the next election (e.g. Przeworski 1991; Manin 1997). A complementary reason is that elected representatives bring to the process experience, knowledge and insight, this partly because they specialize in decision-making, and partly because they would not otherwise be elected (Manin 1997). Perhaps surprising it is a rare undertaking to evaluate empirically whether representational decision-making fosters acceptance. However, reports on declining support for, and trust in, current representative regimes suggest that representational decision-making is less effective today than it used to be (e.g. Inglehart 1999; Dalton 2004).

The main reasons why affected persons should accept decisions made by expert bureaucrats is that they are acting on delegation from elected representatives, and that their decisions are based on professional knowledge. Empirical evaluations have looked mainly at the effects of expert decision-making that is biased or unbiased in terms of openness and neutrality. Evidence from tax compliance, land use politics and Supreme Court ruling suggest that expert decisions stand a better chance to be accepted if affected persons perceive that decision-makers have followed fair procedures (Murphy 2003; Grimes 2006; Tyler, Casper & Fisher 1996). However, studies like these have little to say on whether acceptance would be affected if the same decisions were to be made by referendum or by representative decision-making.

To emphasize that all three forms of decision-making are acceptable from a principled point of view, participants in the experiments were told that the decision in question was preceded by public debates. Due to the “deliberative turn” of democratic theory preference formation has been much discussed during the past decade or so, and by assuring that affected persons had been given opportunities to contemplate the matter at hand we wanted to hold constant deliberative aspects of the decision-making process at a reasonably high level (e.g. Chambers 2003).

Learning to Care About Procedures

Political socialization, the field of research directly concerned with the learning of politically relevant norms and values, has indirect bearing on the issue of learning to care about procedures. According to the limited empirical evidence available, it would appear that early socialization is important for the building of trust in government (Dennis & Easton 1967; Sapiro 2004), governmental trust should in turn make it easier for individuals to overlook unfavorable outcomes (e.g. Brockner 2002; Tyler et al. 1997; Tyler 2006). Overall, however, there is little systematic knowledge on the topic.

Turning to public schools as a prime institution for learning societal norms, there is reason to argue that learning to care about procedures should be part of the education for democratic citizenship. Collective decisions must be made, and insights of the pros and cons of various forms of decision-making may facilitate individuals’ “capacity to live and cooperate with others”, and to “resolve conflicts in accordance with principles of democratic law”, to list some educational requirements put up by the European Council (Audigier 2000).

democracy, whereof the most severe is that it, ironically, tend to run contrary to the value of equality.
However, it should also be acknowledged that democratic education is a complex task (e.g. Callan 2004). For one thing, Western public school systems are under pressure from competing interest groups related to religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, minority standings, and environmental concerns, who all want their values to be recognized in the education (e.g. McDonough & Feinberg 2003). Teachers thus have to prioritize between various aspects of democratic citizenship, including values like tolerance and civic engagement, not all of them related to procedural concerns.

Decision-Acceptance
As illustrated by concepts like “consent”, “legitimacy”, “political obligations”, “compliance”, “system support” and “political trust”, citizens’ reaction towards authoritative decisions is a classic theme in political science. “Decision acceptance” is related to all these concepts, but its scope is more short-term and more narrowly defined. Acknowledging that reactions towards a specific decision may have long-term and over-arching consequences (e.g. Tyler 2006), and that reactions towards authorities is a phenomenon with normative implications (is one morally obliged to comply with the decision or not?) (e.g. Levi & Stoker 2000), our interest in this paper is only to identify conditions under which affected persons are willing to play along with a particular decision.

The way we conceive it decision-acceptance has both an attitudinal (is it voluntary or forced) and behavioral component (will one’s actions comply with the decision). To capture it with survey instruments we have asked participants in the experiments to rate their satisfaction with the outcome, the fairness of the outcome, how agreeable the outcome is, and how willing they are to comply with the regulation that follows from the decision. We thus measure attitudes as well as behavioral intention. These types of reactions are often used separately in social justice research; for instance it has been shown that outcome satisfaction and outcome fairness can be conceptually distinct (Skitka, Winquist & Hutchinson 2003). However, given its complex character, we believe that decision acceptance is best represented by joining together all four types of reactions in a single measure. Empirical evidence supports this view. The items in question are highly internally correlated in all our experiments (the average pearsonian correlation varies between .72 and .80), and when entered into a principal component analysis together with items related to procedural perceptions, they form a separate factor.

Data
Treatment
Overall we conducted six identically structured scenario experiments. At the stage of recruitment, potential participants were invited to a study on decision-making with no further specifications made. Those who accepted the invitation were given a version of a randomly distributed printed handout. The handout begun with a short introduction to a policy matter that was to be collectively decided. In the introduction, basic pros and cons of the decision alternatives were given.

4 For question wordings, see Appendix
5 For more detailed information, see Gilljam, Esaiasson & Lindholm (2007).
As our prime example of policy matter, we opted to ask whether religious symbols should be banned from schools. The issue was chosen because it involves deep personal values, and because it reflects a controversial matter that can not be easily solved by a compromise (a ban should either be introduced or not). Beginning with a hotly contested decision to ban religious symbols in French schools, the issue has been publicly debated also in the national context of relevance here, Sweden, mostly in regard to young Islamic women’s right to wear various forms of head cloths.

After reading the short introductory text, participants were probed about their own policy preference. High school students and teachers were told that the decision was to be made at the level of their own school, whereas our samples of general citizens and political science undergraduates were told that the decision was to be made at the level of their local communes. A clear majority in all studies (between 61 and 78 percent) preferred the liberal alternative that religious symbols should not be banned from schools.

To enhance generalizability, we conducted two additional studies in which high-school students were confronted with other collective matters. First, whether teachers’ should be given the right to seize noising mobile phones. Although the issue touches upon basic political values like liberty and order, this issue was chosen to reflect a matter of immediate and large personal importance for most students (69 percent preferred the liberal alternative to not allow teachers to temporarily confiscate noising mobile phones). Second, whether the means resulting from a collective fund raising at their school should be used for school trips, or whether it should be given to charity, as exemplified by support to “Doctors without borders”. The issue was chosen to provide for a natural compromise outcome (half of the surplus would then be used for each purpose). A majority of participants (52 percent) preferred the compromise alternative to use half of the surplus for each purpose, whereas the two other alternatives were preferred by 32 percent (school trips only) and 15 percent (charity only), respectively.

After being probed on their personal preference, participants were informed that the decision could be made according to three different forms of decision making: by affected persons in a referendum, by elected representatives, or by expert bureaucrats with delegated authority. (When adapted to the milieu of public schools, the three forms of decision-making were “student referendum”, “elected representatives in the student council” and “the teaching staff in their role as expert administrators”, respectively.) Participants were then told that the matter had been publicly debated.

Following this, our two manipulations were introduced: Participants were informed that (i) elected representatives (or affected persons in a referendum, or expert bureaucrats) had (ii) decided in favor of one or the other of the alternatives. Participants were then asked a series of closed-ended survey questions about their reactions towards the decision, judgments on the decision-making procedures used, and views on the authorities involved. The questionnaire also included questions on social characteristics and basic political attitudes, as well as some questions of no relevance to this study. Finally, participants were de-briefed.

In combination with information on participants’ personal preference, the type of outcome received has been used to categorize participants as winners (who receive a favorable outcome) and losers (who receive an unfavorable outcome), respectively. Five studies are thus of a 2 (winner or loser) x 3 (forms of decision-making) factorial design, whereas the sixth study on the use of the means from the collective fund raising is of a 3 (winner, loser
and the compromise alternative in-between) x 3 (forms of decision-making) factorial design. A series of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no statistically significant differences between treatment groups in terms of social and political characteristics, and preference about outcome, indicating that the randomization process worked satisfactorily.

Participants
High-school students were recruited in a three step procedure. We first contacted Heads of high schools in the metropolitan areas of Stockholm and Göteborg, respectively. When given permission to proceed, we took contact with homeroom teachers in respective school. Finally, as we visited their class room for the data collection, students were asked by us whether they wanted to participate. The teacher-study was carried out in connection to a one-day teachers’ seminar involving all personnel in a school district of Göteborg City. Since participants teach at junior level of the education system, they were asked to think of themselves as working with high school students. The study on adult citizens was carried out at the Central Station of Göteborg. Travelers by bus and train were promised a chocolate bar if they agreed to participate. The study on political science undergraduates were carried out in connection to lectures at the introductory level at the universities of Göteborg and Lund, respectively. The curriculum varies in details between the two universities, but during the term all students had been required to read and contemplate over standard political science work on democratic theory.

Table 1 provides basic information on the six samples. It can be noted that our sample of teachers reflects the feminization of the profession, and that our sample of adult citizens is skewed towards higher ages, which is due to a high proportion of mature commuters to suburban areas (the mean age of the Swedish electorate is roughly 47 years). By and large, our non-random samples appear to bear a reasonable resemblance to respective population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Males (%)</th>
<th>Foreign Born (%)</th>
<th>Self-reported Political Interest (mean, 1-7)</th>
<th>Age (mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious symbols</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seize Noising Mobile Phones</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Funds Raised</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other samples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult citizens</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science Students</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 No other participants received any reward for their participation.

7 The support of Johan Karlsson at Göteborg University and Magnus Jerneck at Lund University is gracefully acknowledged.
Results

Experiment 1-3: High School Students
Basic findings from Experiment 1 with high school students on the ban of religious symbols are reported in the upper part of Table 2. Results buttress the intuition that in some situations outcome favorability is of prime importance when affected persons decide how to react versus authoritative decisions. Winners score nearly three times as high as losers on our index of decision acceptance (19.2 as compared to 7.7 on a 25 point scale), and when expressed in terms of partial Eta\(^2\), the effect size of outcome favorability is as high as .54 (as yielded by a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), F (1/389) = 466.8, \(p \leq .001\)).

In comparison, forms of decision-making is a week determinant. Although an ANOVA one-way analysis of variance on decision acceptance yielded a significant main effect of forms of decision-making (F (2/389) = 5.2, \(p \leq .01\)), the effect size (partial Eta\(^2\)) is a low .03. To further underline that procedural concerns are of little substantial importance, mean scores on the decision-acceptance index for the three decision forms only vary between 14.3 (student referenda) and 12.0 (teacher staff). Moreover, a test for interaction effects turns out negatively, indicating that winners and losers react similarly to all three forms of decision-making (one-way ANOVA, F (2/389) = 0.3, \(p=.72\)).

When comparing the three forms of decision-making, and in accordance with expectations from the literature, student referendum is somewhat more effective in producing decision-acceptance (Games-Howell post hoc tests show a statistically significant difference between referendum and expert decision-making at the .05-level, whereas representative decision-making does not differ significantly from the other two decision forms). Thus, it would appear that students would be slightly more willing to accept the authoritative decision if it was taken by them selves in a referendum than if the decision was taken by the teaching staff in their role as expert administrators.

To find out whether results generalize to other policy issues, Experiment 2 confronts high-school students with a decision on teachers’ rights to seize noising mobile phones, an issue of immediate personal importance to them (middle part of Table 2).

This time, dominance of outcome considerations is even more pronounced. Mean decision acceptance varies between 19.0 among winners and 6.8 among losers, and when expressed in terms of partial Eta\(^2\), the size of the main effect of outcome favorability is as high as .63 (as yielded by a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), F (1/270) = 452.9, \(p \leq .001\)). In sharp contrast, a one-way ANOVA analysis of variance did not yield a significant main effect of decision forms (F (2/270) = 0.4, \(p=.67\)). Again, there is no evidence of an interaction effect between outcome favorability and forms of decision-making so that winners and losers should react differently to various ways of making the decision (one-way ANOVA F (2/270) = 0.8, \(p = .44\)).

Thus, in this matter of immediate personal importance, high school students’ willingness to accept the decision is exclusively determined by whether they win or lose. It makes no difference whether the decision is made by all affected students in a referendum, by elected student representatives, or by teaching staff in their role as expert administrators.
Table 2. Decision Acceptance (0-24) in Various Policy Matters by Forms of Decision-Making and Outcome Favorability Among High School Students (means and SD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Decision-making</th>
<th>Outcome favorability</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winners (n=192)</td>
<td>Losers (n=203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wins (n=126)</td>
<td>Losers (n=150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wins (n=96)</td>
<td>In-between (Compromise) (n=145)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Experiment 1: Should Religious Symbols Be Banned From Schools?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Decision-making</th>
<th>Outcome favorability</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winners (n=192)</td>
<td>Losers (n=203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student referendum (n=140)</td>
<td>20.4 (4.5)</td>
<td>8.9 (5.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student representatives (n=130)</td>
<td>18.6 (5.8)</td>
<td>7.5 (6.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff as Expert Administrators (n=125)</td>
<td>18.7 (5.4)</td>
<td>6.6 (4.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=395)</td>
<td>19.2 (5.3)</td>
<td>7.7 (5.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Experiment 2: Should Teachers Be Allowed To Seize Noising Mobile Phones?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Decision-making</th>
<th>Outcome favorability</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winners (n=126)</td>
<td>Losers (n=150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student referendum</td>
<td>19.7 (3.3)</td>
<td>6.6 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student representatives</td>
<td>18.8 (4.3)</td>
<td>6.3 (5.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff as Expert Administrators</td>
<td>18.7 (5.4)</td>
<td>7.4 (5.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=276)</td>
<td>19.0 (4.5)</td>
<td>6.8 (5.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Experiment 3: How Should Earnings From A Collective Fund-Raising Be Spent?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Decision-making</th>
<th>Outcome favorability</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winners (n=96)</td>
<td>In-between (Compromise) (n=145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student referendum (n=91)</td>
<td>19.9 (5.2)</td>
<td>13.4 (6.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student representatives (n=96)</td>
<td>20.9 (4.3)</td>
<td>13.6 (5.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff as Expert Administrators (n=91)</td>
<td>19.6 (5.4)</td>
<td>12.3 (6.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=282)</td>
<td>20.2 (4.9)</td>
<td>13.1 (5.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Justifications of democracy often focus on its capacity to give all members of a society a fair chance to be on the winning side when collective matters are decided (Dahl 1989:89-91). One way of accomplishing this ideal in practical politics is to make compromises, where conflicting sides get parts of their preferences fulfilled (e.g. Lijphart 1984). Our experiment with high school students on the use of earnings from a collective fund raising was designed to test for the possibility that decision-making procedures matter more in policy matters that allow for a compromise outcome.

From results reported in the lower part of Table 2 we learn that this idea is not supported by the data. A one-way analysis of variance on decision-acceptance did not yield a significant main effect of forms of decision-making (F 2/273) = 2.0, p = .14, mean scores varies between 13.8 and 15.6). As in previous studies, there is no sign of an interaction effect between outcome favorability and forms of decision-making (F (4/273) = 0.5, p = .75).

A look at the outcome favorability effect further supports the conclusion. It is true that the main effect of outcome favorability is reduced in this study (partial Eta\(^2\) is .38 (F 2/273) = 85.5, p≤ .001) as compared to .54 and .63, in Experiment 1 and 2, respectively). However, this reduction is not a consequence of changes in the mechanisms that determine decision acceptance. Rather, it is those who receive an in-between compromise outcome who become roughly linear more willing to accept the outcome. Differences in decision acceptance between winners and losers are just as large as in the two previous studies (comparing winners and losers only, average score on our index of decision acceptance varies between 20.2 and 7.4, and partial Eta\(^2\) is .56, F (1/131) = 168.1, p≤ .001).

In short, a compromise makes it easier for high school students to accept an outcome that does not completely fulfill their preferences, but it does not make them care more about how the decision was made.

**Experiment 4: The Teacher Study**

Experiment 2 and 3 demonstrates that the finding of a weak decision form effect generalizes across different types of policy issues, and that hence empirical evidence speaks against a model of easy and intuitive learning to care about procedures. To evaluate support for a model of traditional life-cycle learning, in which people learn as they grow older, Experiment 4 confronts our sample of teachers with the decision on religious symbols in schools.

As can be seen from Table 3, and perhaps surprising, results turn out to be similar to Experiment 1. If anything, forms of decision-making is an even weaker determinant among teachers than among high school students: a one-way analysis of variance yields a main effect of decision making forms that barely reaches a standard level of significance, (F 2/213 = 2.4, p = .09), and an effect size of .a low .02 (partial Eta\(^2\)). Mean scores for decision acceptance varies between 11.5 and 16.3.

In contrast, we once again find that outcome favorability is a very strong determinant of decision acceptance (mean scores of winners and losers varies between 18.0 and 6.4, and a one-way ANOVA analysis yields a highly significant (F (1/213) = 236.8, p≤ .001), and substantially strong main effect (partial Eta\(^2\) is .56). Thus, empirical evidence from Experiment 4 speaks against also a model of traditional life-cycle learning.

If we for a moment return to the relationship between the various forms of decision-making, and as evidenced by mean scores on the index, teachers agree with students that a referendum
among students is somewhat more effective than the two other forms of decision-making in producing decision-acceptance. Surprisingly, judging from this study it would appear that teachers does not care extra much about decisions that are made by their own group in the role as expert administrators.

Table 3. Should Religious Symbols be Banned from School? Decision Acceptance Among Teachers (0-24) by Forms of Decision-Making and Outcome Favorability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Decision-making</th>
<th>Outcome favorability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winners (n=125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student referenda</td>
<td>18.4 (4.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=58)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student representatives</td>
<td>17.1 (5.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff as Expert Administrators (n=87)</td>
<td>18.3 (4.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>18.0 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experiment 5 and 6: Political Science Undergraduates and Citizens in General

Findings so far has been in the negative as regard decision form effects. Although results are intuitively plausible, this should be a cause of concern for methodological reasons. It may be that our experimental stimulus is too weak to produce meaningful reactions among participants. Remember that they are initially primed to think about the outcome in the policy matter at hand, and that the only information they are given regarding procedures is that decisions could be made according to one of three forms. We would argue that this realistically mirrors many real-life situations, but we cannot preclude that our manipulation is unduly subtle. To assure that findings so far are not merely methodological artifacts, we conducted Experiment 5 with political science undergraduates, who are trained to think in terms of democratic procedures, and who therefore are likely to pay attention to the way decisions are made.

In accordance with our expectations, a one-way analysis of variance on decision acceptance yields a main effect of decision form which is both statistically and substantially significant ($F_{(2/134)} = 5.8$, $p \leq .01$, with an effect size of .08, as compared to .03, .00, .02 and .02 in Experiment 1-4, respectively).

To further evaluate the importance of procedural concerns among political science undergraduates we can look at our point of contrast, outcome favorability-effects. If all three forms of decision-making are of equal and high importance for affected persons’ decision-acceptance, we expect both decision forms and outcome favorability to show weak effects. Losers are then equally willing as winners to accept the outcome under all three forms of decision-making. In accordance with this logic of indirect argumentation, it can be noted that the favorable outcome effect is lower in Experiment 5 than in previous studies (.39, as compared to .54, .63, .56 and .53 in Experiment 1-4, respectively, $F_{(1/134)} = 86.0$, $p \leq .001$).
The shrinking difference between the two determinants further underlines that decision-forms are more important for political science undergraduates than for other groups of participants. Still, it is clear that winning is much more important than choosing the one or the other form of decision-making also among political science students.

As can be seen from mean scores reported in the upper part of Table 4, referendum produces the highest level of decision acceptance (the mean score is 8.7 as compared to 7.0 for representative decision-making and 6.7 for expert bureaucrat decision-making on our 13-point scale). Games-Howell post hoc tests show that referendum acceptance differ significantly at the .05-level from both the other two forms of decision-making. Thus, once again referendum comes out as the relatively most powerful way to motivate citizens to accept authoritative decisions.

Findings this far support a model of advanced learning in which it is a demanding task to make people attentive to the way decisions are made within the framework of a decent democratic polity. However, although less clear cut that in Experiment 5, results from our final experiment with a sample of adult citizens, indicate that forms of decision-making can make a difference for also citizens in general, and that hence data should be interpreted differently (see lower half of Table 4).

A one-way analysis of variance on decision acceptance yields a clearly significant main effect of decision form (F (2/448) = 82.2 p≤.01), with a relatively large effect size of .05. And a contrast point comparison shows that the outcome favorability effect is again lower than in Experiment 1-4 (.43 as compared to effects in the range .53 - .63). Once more it is decisions made by referendum that make the main difference, but also representative decision-making is more effective than the expert-bureaucratic alternative (means scores are 8.0, 7.7 and 7.1, respectively). Moreover, for the first time there is also evidence of a significant interaction effect so that forms of decision-making matters slightly more among losers (F (2/448) = 2.9, p≤.05).

Judging from the data presented here, the educational system seems to function differently than the larger political system. In terms of learning processes, there is support for a life-cycle model in which people learn to care about procedures as they get older, it is only that most of the learning is done outside the institution of public education.
Table 4. Should Religious Symbols be Banned from School? Decision Acceptance (0-12) Among Citizens in General and Political Science Undergraduates by Forms of Decision-Making and Outcome Favorability (means and SD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Decision-making</th>
<th>Outcome favorability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiment 5: Political Science Undergraduates</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referenda (n=37)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected representatives (n=42)</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Administrators (n=61)</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (n=140)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Experiment 6: Citizens in General** |         |        |      |
| Referenda (n=157)                  | 10.1    | 6.2    | 8.0  |
|                                   | (2.5)   | (2.9)  | (3.3) |
| Elected representatives (n=143)    | 10.0    | 5.5    | 7.7  |
|                                   | (2.0)   | (3.2)  | (3.5) |
| Expert Administrators (n=154)      | 9.4     | 4.1    | 7.1  |
|                                   | (2.3)   | (2.6)  | (3.6) |
| All (n=454)                        | 9.8     | 5.4    | 7.7  |
|                                   | (2.3)   | (3.1)  | (3.5) |

**Notes:** The index on decision acceptance is based on two indicators only, “Agreeable” and “Willingness to comply”. See appendix for information on question wording.

**Conclusions**

This study confirms the intuition that in many situations willingness to accept authoritative decisions is first and foremost decided by the received outcome. Under the specified condition – that the policy decision is made according to one of three legitimate forms of decision-making – the prime determinant of decision acceptance is outcome favorability. At most, forms of decision-making add to the acceptance of decisions, and within the educational system they seem to matter even less.

We believe that our findings are helpful when identifying boundary conditions for the much discussed “fair process effect”. This effect is subjective in nature; people are motivated to accept a decision when they perceive that it was preceded by a fair procedure. Our findings indicate that the alternative forms of decision-making available when a decent democratic polity shall come to a decision in controversial policy matters are not salient enough, or not different enough, to activate such positive fairness judgments. When put in economic-rational...
terms: preferences for the one or the other form of decision-making are not clear enough to produce procedural utility when fulfilled. Our findings suggest that procedural justice research is less helpful to democratic authorities in search of ways to secure citizens’ acceptance for difficult policy decisions than optimistic reports can lead us to believe.

However, we should be cautious not to overstretch our case. In addition to the usual disclaimers related to empirical studies of this kind – findings from scenario type of experiments need to be validated by other methodological approaches – we can think of several related aspects of democratic decision-making that are not covered by us. For one thing, we have analyzed short term acceptance of a particular policy decision. Forms of decision-making may well have more long-term effects for the legitimacy of democratic authorities (e.g. Tyler 2006). For another thing, the specifics of decision-making procedures vary by type of decision to make. Many other studies on procedural justice deal with policy implementation, that is how general policies are made to apply to particular situations and to particular individuals.

Moreover, it should not be overlooked that referendum come out systematically more effective in producing decision-acceptance than representative decision-making and expert-bureaucratic decision-making. In accordance with the conclusion from a growing empirical literature, the fact that decisions are made by affected persons themselves seem to be a factor of some importance when people decide how to react versus an authoritative decision (e.g. Lupia & Matsusaka 2004).

In relation to the observation that we know little about processes for learning to care about procedures for decision-making, it is noteworthy that we find the smallest decision form-effects among high-school students and their teachers. This means that both groups react almost exclusively over substantial aspects of the issues at hand. They know which outcome they prefer – whether religious symbols should be banned or not – and see no strong reason to care about whether the decision was made by student referendum, by an elected student council, or by the teaching staff in their role as expert administrators. Education systems are regularly criticized for segregating students from the places where politics is enacted (Sapiro 2004). The presumption underlying this criticism is that more is to be learned from being part of the “real thing”; that is being involved in politics in larger communities. It could be that teachers in our studies are responding to this line of criticism and hence define democratic procedures to be mainly pertinent to the outside political system.

In contrast to this view, we designed our experiments under the assumption that schools are political systems in their own right. We cannot help believing that students would benefit from an education system that helped them to apply democratic principles to their own context. Agreement on procedures is a civilized way to solve problems of collective decision-making, and this study reminds us that this insight needs to be constantly discussed.
Appendix

The following items were included in our Index of Decision Acceptance (in Experiment 5 and 6 only items Agreeable and Compliance were included):

What’s your view on the decision? (Agreeable)
According to your view, how fair was the decision? (Fairness)
How satisfied are you with the decision? (Satisfaction)
How willing are you to accept and comply with the decision? (Compliance)

For all items, responses were registered on a 7-point scale with designated endpoints “I don’t like it at all” and “Very much” (Agreeable); and “Not at all” and “Very much” (other items), respectively.
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