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Citizens' Support for Rival Modes of Political Involvement in Energy Policy-Making. The Case of Finland in 2007-2016

1. Introduction

The voter turnout and citizens' attachment to political parties and trade unions have declined significantly throughout Europe and Northern America. Citizens' changing attitudes and expectations towards government are stimulating a search for different democratic processes that move away from traditional models of representative democracy (e.g., Dalton, 2004).

The modes of direct citizen involvement such as referendums, civic initiatives, deliberative democracy, online democracy, and political consumerism (political involvement through consumption choices) have been introduced and also applied in practice. A common denominator underlying these direct modes of political involvement is a conviction that people would participate more actively if they were offered more effective ways to be politically involved. However, this viewpoint has been challenged by the theory of stealth democracy which argues that people want to withdraw from politics. They do not want to make political decisions themselves and they do not want to provide much input to those who are assigned to make these decisions (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to test citizens' support for two rival models of political involvement, political consumerism and stealth democracy, in relation to representative democracy in the context of the Finnish energy policy-making. Thus, theoretical contribution of the study is to broaden the conceptions of the relative importance of various forms of political involvement among the citizenry. Methodologically, this study is based on postal surveys conducted among 18-75-year old Finns in 2007 and 2016.

The study focuses on energy policy, a societal sector where citizens' involvement was seen to be more limited than in most other policy domains (Chubb, 1983, pp. 258-9). Energy policy was defined here as political steering conducted by political decision-makers and public authorities focusing on energy management. (Ruostetsaari, 2008). Some firms, especially state-owned and more generally, those operating in the energy supply, have had privileged access to decision-making arenas, which have remained mostly opaque for the citizens (Prontera, 2009, p. 23). Identical findings have also been reported in Finland. Despite the new rules of the game – from monopolies and extensive regulation via competition and deregulation to re-regulation – and the Europeanization of the Finnish energy sector, a number of key decision-makers of energy policy has been fairly small and stable from the end of 1980s to the end of the first decade of the 2000s. Energy policy-making have been dominated by energy producers, even if the voice of large energy-consuming firms has grown. Civic associations and consumer-citizens have had difficulty in gaining access to the decision-making of energy policy (Ruostetsaari, 2010, pp. 291-4). However, citizens' opportunities to make consumption choices in the energy sector have increased because many countries, including Finland, have discharged their energy monopolies or deregulated their energy policies which has strengthened the role of market mechanisms.

Finland is a particularly suitable platform for a critical test of political consumerism and stealth democracy for several reasons. First, in Finland popular support for political consumerism is one of the highest by international standards together with other Nordic countries, Switzerland, and Germany, with Southern and Eastern Europe lagging behind (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Second, Finns' voter turnout and civil efficacy (the sense that one can understand political processes and participate in them meaningfully) is low, while the trust in political and societal institutions, including science and technology is high by international standards (e.g., Norris, 2011; Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2014; Rucht, 1997; Rask, 2008). Citizens' trust in technology and experts has materialized in Finnish energy-policy-making. While construction of new nuclear power plants has been prohibited in many

countries, the Parliament of Finland licensed the construction of two nuclear power plants in 2010. Moreover, Finland is the first country in which the process for the final disposal of spent nuclear fuel in the bedrock has been authorized both at the national (Parliament in 2001) and local (municipal council in 2000) levels (Litmanen and Kojo, 2011). Third, the Finnish societal context changed dramatically from 2007 to 2016 due to sharp changes in economic development and the legitimacy of political system. We may anticipate that these economic and political fluctuations reflected to citizens' attitudes and increased their willingness to complement or replace the electoral participation with other modes of political involvement to influence energy policy-making.

The study proceeds as follows. First, the theoretical starting points dealing with political consumerism and stealth democracy are defined. The hypotheses that direct the empirical analysis will be derived from this theoretical reflection. Second, societal context of the Finnish case study is specified by outlining the deteriorating economic fluctuations and outbreak of a major political scandal. Third, research method and the data are described. Fourth, the analysis is composed of three sections where the effects of social background on the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy as well as the interrelationship between political consumerism and stealth democracy are analysed. Finally, conclusions are made based on empirical analysis and the findings are discussed in light of the theoretical starting points.

2. Political consumerism as a mode of political involvement

Political consumerism may substitute for conventional forms of participation that are increasingly perceived as less efficient and less suitable for the global nature of political problems (Stolle and Hooghe, 2006, p. 266). According to Stolle and Micheletti (2013, pp. 39, 24), political consumerism can be defined as “actions taken by those who make choices among producers, products, and services with the aim of changing objectionable institutional or market practices.” Their choices are based on

attitudes and values concerning issues of justice and fairness, or noneconomic issues regarding personal or family well-being, as well as ethical assessments of favorable business and governmental practices. Consumption can be a venue for people to express themselves politically or set the political agenda of other actors and institutions, such as government and business. The concept combines the two traditions of consumption and citizenship, which tended to be located in opposing spheres of private and public life (see Follesdahl, 2006).

For the realization of political consumerism, first, individual motivation is essential: citizens have to be motivated to both seek and use information to develop values and to formulate preferences or an ethical compass that facilitates the making of reasonable choices. Second, they must feel that their actions matter, that is, they must have a sense of agency or empowerment to engage in the choice practices associated with individualized responsibility-taking. Thus, a sense of civic efficacy is an important individual attribute for political consumerism (Stolle and Micheletti 2013).

Many scholars (E.g., Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Tarrow, 2000) have been worried that new unconventional acts, such as protesting, would crowd out conventional forms of participation. The fundamental question is, as also presented in this study: are political consumers alienated from the political system, causing them to resort to new, non-electoral approaches of participation exclusively, or do they use various types of participation and voice simultaneously, whereby political consumerism becomes an additional tool in their expanding political action repertoires? (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013, pp. 65-6).

Political consumerism has been found to be connected to the citizen agency of higher education, of young people, and of women (e.g. Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Therefore, these variables will be employed in this study in order to compare citizens' attitudes on political consumerism and stealth democracy.

Political consumerism requires more resources and skills from the participants to compensate for the missing institutional framework. Education, especially tertiary education, can contribute in at least three ways. First, it gives individuals the skills they need if they are to effectively participate in politics. Second, political consumers necessarily must have high levels of political interest and political information to find out about and act upon issues in the marketplace. Generally, levels of political interest and political information increase with higher education. Third, education is positively associated with income and because political consumerism involves selectively purchasing goods, it also requires significant expenditures. Thus, education levels might be critical in an indirect way to those who practice political consumerism (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013, p. 62). Thus, with regard to influencing the Finnish energy policy, *we hypothesize, first, that the higher the individual's level of education, the more she or he endorses political consumerism (H1.1).*

The attractiveness of political consumerism for young people is not well studied, but seems that an important explanation is the appeal of life-style politics among the young, trends towards individualization, and their tendency to find the formal political sphere alienating (Micheletti, 2003, pp. 17-8). It seems, however, plausible that the youngest, although inclined to Internet activism and other protest activities, might not be as susceptible to political consumerism because of lack of resources. The middle-aged cohort, who face mobilizational life-cycle effects such as children, careers, and a general peak of involvement might be more active in political consumerism (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013, p. 64). *We hypothesize, second, that the middle-aged cohorts endorse more political consumerism than the youngest and the oldest cohorts (H1.2).*

Three factors explain the role of women in political consumerism. First, women are assumed to have responsibility for shopping for the family on a daily basis. They are thus more involved with consumer issues than men or children. Second, studies show that women have a lower risk perception threshold than men. Third, because women have historically been excluded from institutions in the public sphere and their issues have been seen as non-political, they have been forced to create other sites to

express their political concerns and work for their political interests (Micheletti, 2003, pp. 17-18; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2006, p. 208). Thus, *we hypothesize, third, that women endorse political consumerism more than men* (H1.3).

3. Vision of stealth democracy on citizens' political involvement

Political scientists have studied citizens' support for specific policies, political parties, governmental institutions, and for democracy in general, but citizens have not often been asked in detail about their attitudes on how they want their government to work. Americans, for example, were found to be attuned to the way government works more than to what it produces (i.e., they pay attention to the processes more than the policies) (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2005). Also Finnish political scientists have analysed empirically citizens' attitudes on the working of democratic processes (Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009; Bengtsson, 2012; Ruostetsaari, 2017).

According to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2005, pp. 1-2, 12, 139-143), rather than wanting a more active, participatory democracy, a large number of people want what they call stealth democracy. Their claim is that the people do not routinely play an active role in decision-making, or in providing input for or monitoring decision-makers. People want to distance themselves from government not because of a system defect but because many people are simply averse to disagreement and political conflict and believe political conflict is unnecessary and an indication that something is wrong with governmental procedures.

Determining appropriate policy action requires no elaborate institutions and powerful elected officials. Because of elected representatives, people do not need to constantly pay attention to many issues about which they do not care. Due to that individuals are often too uninformed, unmotivated, or narrow-minded to exert appropriate political influence, politicians, experts and businessmen should

make the decisions for them. Elites are not what the citizens fear; rather, it is self-serving elites who are feared (ibid).

Citizens' dissatisfaction toward government usually stems from perceptions of how government does its business, not what the government does; the policy matters, but process, rather than policy, is often a better predictor of citizens' attitudes and behaviors with respect to government (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2005). The fact that citizens have preferences for policy and process has also been shown in European studies. In the absence of clearly formulated interests and related identities that representatives could work to promote, elected officials have become more detached from their constituency. Voting has come to resemble a Schumpeterian (1959) picture of democratic elitism where the main concern is to elect people into positions of power, leaving actual issues of substance and policy directions largely indeterminable. This is a particular concern in the Finnish multiparty system where citizens can never know at the ballot box exactly how their votes will be used, which political parties will form the government coalition, and what objectives they will adopt in the government program (Paloheimo and Borg, 2009).

However, the stealth democracy claim that the experts are legitimate policy-makers equal to the elected officials, has long been challenged by several scholars. According to Frank Fischer (1990), fundamental to the critique of technocratic expertise is the argument that experts have relied too much on and misused scientific and technical knowledge. We argue that this challenge especially concerns the energy policy: perceiving the societal and environmental effects of various ways to produce energy requires that citizens have some understanding of energy technology.

Western science and technology policy has generally been seen as a policy sector that is dominated by experts and public administration, where political decision-makers have neither played, nor had an aspiration to play a role (Kuitunen and Lähteenmäki-Smith, 2006; Peterson and Sharp, 2001). This is also the case in Finland; governmental policy-making in the field of science and technology has been dominated by experts, perhaps more so than any other policy sector (Lemola, 2004). However,

Finns have trusted most in the technology among various actors or devices in solving environmental problems caused by energy production and consumption (Ruostetsaari, 2010).

We anticipate that there are differences between various socio- demographic citizen groups in terms of the endorsement of stealth democracy. According to the Finnish election study, the privileged citizens, on the average, vote more actively in general elections and have a higher civic efficacy than the less privileged; the highly educated vote more actively, have better political knowledge, and feel more civic efficacy than the poorly educated. The middle age cohort is politically more active and has better political knowledge than young and elderly people, but has a lesser sense of civic efficacy than the youngest cohorts. Women have lesser political knowledge and the sense of civic efficacy although they vote more actively than men (Wass and Borg, 2016, pp. 183-186; Rapeli and Borg, 2016, pp. 361-363). Thus, we *hypothesize that the lower the individual's level of education, the more she or he endorses stealth democracy (H2.1); the middle-aged cohorts endorse less stealth democracy than the youngest and the oldest cohorts (H2.2); and men support more stealth democracy than women (H2.3).*

The citizens' attitudes on political consumerism and stealth democracy are expected to be the reverse in terms of education, age, and gender which is manifested in the hypotheses H1 and H2. Thus, we anticipate that stealth democracy can be seen as a reaction among people who feel powerless in the face of the regime, while the supporters of political consumerism have a higher sense of civil efficacy, i.e., they feel that they can influence energy policy directly through their consumption choices rather than through representative democracy. Thus, *we hypothesize that the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy correlates negatively with the electoral participation as a mode of influencing energy policy-making (H3).* The hypothesis is based on the notion that both political consumerism and stealth democracy may be seen as alternative modes of political involvement or attitudes on conventional electoral participation. *We hypothesize, finally, that citizens' support for political consumerism and stealth democracy has increased in the context of government's*

decreasing political and economic output from 2007 to 2016 (H4). These social changes have challenged the legitimacy of the political system among the citizenry.

4. Finland as a case study

After the early 1990s, the societal operating environment of the Finnish decision-makers and the general population was dominated by deep economic fluctuations. The Finnish economy collapsed more drastically in the early 1990s than any other developed market economy after the Second World War (Kuisma and Keskiarja, 2012) and the country plunged into the deepest recession in its history. Social services were cut, and the welfare state began to disintegrate as a result of the cuts in government expenditures. This “great recession” in 1991-1993 was followed by rapid economic growth based mainly on governmental investments in research and development and the expansion of the electronics industry, especially Nokia Ltd. However, Finland’s economic boom was halted in 2008 by the international financial crisis and the euro zone crisis. Due to that the Finnish economy is heavily dependent on exports, the gross national product decreased by 8% in 2009 compared with 2008. Although this recession was only about half as severe as the recession of the 1990s, the GNP still decreased in Finland more than in other euro area countries and in those EU member states that had joined the European Union before 2004 (Pohjola, 2010). The recession originating from 2008 lasted longer than that of the early 1990s; According to a forecast of Bank of Finland, the 2008 GNP will be exceeded not until 2019 (Helsingin Sanomat, 2017).

In particular, the Finnish political decision-makers was shaken by the election campaign funding scandal of 2008, which was the most serious political scandal in Finland to date as measured by publicity surrounding the events (Kantola, 2011, p. 165). This scandal together with the international financial crisis, the crisis of the euro zone and the Greek and Portuguese bail-outs dominated public debate in 2008-2011 and undermined the legitimacy of the major political parties affecting the results

of the 2011 general election; the electoral support of the populist Finns' Party increased from 4.1% in 2007 to 19.1% in 2011 and 17.7% in 2015. Thus, the legitimacy of the political rule was called into question.

A withdrawal from the channels of conventional political activism also applies to Finland. The voter turnout in Finland (67.9% in the 2007 general election; 70.5% in 2011; and 70.1% in 2015) was within the lowest third of all Western democracies, and it has decreased more sharply than in many other countries, especially within Scandinavia (Norris, 2011). While citizens' trust in government decreased by an average of two percentage points in member states of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (from 45% to 43%) between 2007 and 2015, in Finland and Spain the decrease was one of the largest, 20 percentage points (from 76% to 56%) (OECD, 2017). However, Finns' confidence in societal institutions has been high by international standards. Finns' trust in the political and legal systems and in other people was the highest among the 28 EU member states in 2013 (Eurostat 2015). Moreover, Finns' attitude was the second most positive after Denmark for the overall influence of companies on society among the 27 EU member states and Brazil, China, India, Turkey, and the US (Eurobarometer 2013). In fact, Finns' confidence in expert institutions such as universities as well as science and research in general has increased from 2007 to 2016. While in 2007 51% percent of Finns perceived that science can solve very or fairly well energy problems, in 2016 the share was much higher, 65% (Science Barometer, 2016).

Simultaneously, Finnish people's high trust in societal institutions has been accompanied by low subjective civil efficacy which has been at a much lower level than in Europe on average. In 2008, it was the third lowest among 23 European countries (Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2014). Finns' low civic efficacy concerns also energy policy-making. More than a half of the citizens were dissatisfied with their potential to influence energy policy; the proportion of the citizenry who agreed (fully or somewhat) with the statement that "citizens' opinions have not been heard sufficiently enough in

energy policy decisions” was 71% (mean) in 1983-1993, 67% in 1994-2000, and 64 % in 2001-2007 (Energy Attitudes, 2007).

All in all, the Finnish attitudinal climate characterized by a mix of low voter turnout, low civic efficacy but high trust in political and science institutions may have created incentives among the citizenry to look for alternative means for traditional political involvement, i.e., influencing energy policy through their own consumption choices (political consumerism), or leaving decision-making to experts rather than politicians.

5. Method and data

Methodologically, this study was based on a postal survey (and Internet survey in 2016) that was conducted among a random sample representing 18-75-year old Finns. The field-work, covering one reminder round, was carried out in May-October 2007 and August–October 2016. Even if the rate of response was rather low (30.0% in 2007 and 33.6% in 2016), the large size of the sample (N=4000) ensures that the data adequately represent the Finnish population at large (see also Ruostetsaari, 2017). Because the questionnaires were identical in both surveys, we can compare to what extent citizens’ attitudes on energy policy have changed from 2007 to 2016. The year 2007 portrays the period when the economic growth was rapid and the legitimacy of the political system was fairly strong among the population. However, the year 2016 depicts the period preceded by a prolonged recession and declining legitimacy of the political system.

However, the data deviates in minor respects from the population at large (Table 1). Compared to the population at large, the highly educated were overrepresented, while individuals with only basic education were underrepresented in the samples. In terms of education fields, people educated in the engineering and service branch were somewhat underrepresented. With regard to occupational position, lower functionaries were underrepresented, while managers and upper functionaries, blue-

collar workers and pensioners were somewhat overrepresented. Individuals living in detached houses were clearly overrepresented and those living in attached houses or apartment houses were underrepresented. In addition to the background variables listed in Table 1, people living in small municipalities (4,000-8,000 inhabitants) were somewhat overrepresented, while those living in large municipalities (more than 80,000 inhabitants) were underrepresented. However, the respondents represented the various regions of the country (provinces) with an even distribution. (Statistics Finland, 2008; 2016). Moreover, it was possible that the respondents were somewhat more interested in energy issues than the general Finnish population. In 2007, 26% had changed their electricity supplier, while in 2016 the share was as high as 52%.

Table 1 about here

6. Endorsement of political consumerism

The respondents to surveys conducted in 2007 and 2016 were asked how useful they perceived various devices in influencing energy policy. The response options were “very useful”, “fairly useful”, “fairly useless”, “totally useless”, and “can’t say” (Table 2).

Citizens’ attitudes regarding their possibility of influencing energy policy through consumption choices were very positive. The most useful devices in 2007 and 2016 were instructing children on energy issues and choosing energy-pinching appliances which epitomizes so-called discursive political consumerism (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013).

Table 2 here

However, the endorsement of almost all single forms of political consumerism decreased from 2007 to 2016. The endorsement increased only in three cases; asking for competitive tenders from electricity companies, contacts with representatives of energy producing firms, and using “green

energy”. The common denominator for these devices is making use of the liberalized competition in the electricity market with regard to households in 1998 (Ruostetsaari, 2010).

The most interesting finding was that voting in elections (15th) and the modes that can be termed here as participatory political consumerism, i.e., contacts with MPs (21st), acting in civic associations (17th), contacts with representatives of energy producing firms (18th), and contacts with public authorities (19th), were ranked as clearly less useful devices to influence energy policy than all traditional forms of political consumerism.

In order to assess whether the attitudes on political consumerism affect those of representative democracy (i.e., voting in general elections as a useful device in influencing energy policy), citizens were divided into two dichotomous groups based on citizens’ attitudes on various devices listed in Table 2. These groups were supporters (responding with very or fairly useful) and non-supporters (fairly or total useless, or can’t say) of political consumerism. We constructed a sum variable comprising all devices queried in 2007 and 2016 (excluding “voting in elections” which represents the conventional political participation). This dichotomous grouping of respondents and the sum variable will also be used in the following analyses.

Among the supporters of political consumerism, 69% perceived voting in elections as a useful (very or fairly useful) device to influence energy policy in 2007 and 2016, while the proportion of non-supporters was 48% in 2007 and 43% in 2016. Among the adherents to political consumerism, 25% regarded voting useless (totally or somewhat useless) in 2007 and 30% in 2016, while the proportion of non-supporters was 50% in 2007 and 47% in 2016. Taking account all respondents, the number of adherents to political consumerism increased from 45% in 2007 to 48% in 2016 which was below the support for conventional political involvement (“voting in elections”; 57% in 2007 and 56% in 2016).

7. Endorsement of stealth democracy

To test whether citizens are willing to assign the decision-making of energy policy to experts representing public administration and business rather than elected officials the respondents were asked a structured question, as follows: “How great is the importance that you attach to following principles in energy policy-making?” The response options were “very important”, “fairly important”, “not really important”, “not important at all”, and “can’t say” (Table 3). To test our hypotheses, we constructed a sum variable from five of the statements mentioned in Table 3. The five statements all depict the claim of stealth democracy, as follows: “experts should be in charge of the drafting of decisions”, “experts should be in charge of decision-making”, “representatives of firms should take part in decision-making”, “business organizations should play a central role in the decision-making”, and “decisions should be made by consensus as a result of negotiations”. The mean support (very or somewhat important) for the sum variable among the citizenry was 71% in 2007 and 72% in 2016, which exceeded support for representative democracy, i.e. the statement according to which “those politically responsible to the constituency should be in charge of decisions”. However, citizens’ attitudes on all of the normative statements concerning energy policy-making have changed marginally from 2007 to 2016.

Table 3 here

Popular support for four out of five above-mentioned statements exceeded that for the representative democracy excluding one statement according to which “business organizations should play a central role in decision-making”. Our finding that citizens were willing to see political power more in the hands of non-elected experts than businessmen was in agreement with Bengtsson and Mattila’s (2009, p. 1040) survey conducted among Finns in 2007 (not focused on energy policy). They found that approximately 30% were in favor of giving power to more pronounced experts, while less than 20% wished to give more power to business leaders. These proportions are lower than in our survey that focused on energy policy. Results from the World Values Survey of 1995, however, provided a different result, which indicated that political or economic factors might strongly influence the

answers. Finland showed the strongest support among Western democracies for an extended use of expert rule in political matters. As much as 61% of the Finnish respondents gave a positive response to this question in 1995, compared with 33% in Norway, 34% in the US and 38% in Sweden (ibid).

8. The effect of social background on the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy

8.1. Education

Education is generally seen to enhance civic participation by developing skills such as analytical and rhetorical skills, which are relevant in politics (see Verba, Lehman Schlozman and Brady, 1995). However, *basic education* did not explain statistically Finns' adherence to political consumerism even if the support was highest in 2016 among citizens who completed high school. In terms of the sum variable that measured the support for various devices of political consumerism on the average, the dependence was not statistically significant. However, in terms of individual devices, the dependence was significant ($p < .05$) in 14 of 22 cases in 2007, and in 15 of 24 cases in 2016, respectively (Table 4).

Table 3 here

Similarly, *vocational education* did not affect the citizens' trust in political consumerism as a means of influencing energy policy. In terms of the sum variable, the effect of educational level on the endorsement of political consumerism was not statistically significant. However, in terms of individual devices, a statistically significant dependence ($p < .05$) was observed in 17 of 22 cases in 2007, but only in eight of 24 cases were statistically significant in 2016. Thus, our hypothesis (H1.1) whereby the higher the individual's level of education is, the more she endorses political consumerism, was not verified.

In terms of stealth democracy, we hypothesized that, in contrast to the case of political consumerism, the lower the individual's level of education, the more she or he endorses stealth democracy (H2.1). We anticipated that highly educated people would support stealth democracy less than other people would because well-off people have more material and knowledge-based resources at their disposal with which to influence than the more disadvantaged. Thus, well-off people do not have to rely on experts as much as the disadvantaged.

Neither *basic education* nor *vocational education* explained statistically the adherence to stealth democracy. The adherence to stealth democracy was not highest among people with the lowest education level (primary school) but among individuals with elementary school education. In terms of vocational education, the support was lowest among the least educated citizens, i.e., those who had no occupational education at all in 2007 and 2016, rather than among the most highly educated citizens. Thus, our finding differed from that of a Finnish survey conducted in 2007 among the general population in which the support for stealth democracy correlated with lower education levels (Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009). Thus, our hypothesis (H2.1) was not verified.

8.2 Age and Gender

We hypothesized (H1.2) that the middle age cohorts endorse political consumerism more than the youngest and oldest cohorts. In fact, the endorsement of political consumerism was highest in 2007 and 2016 among the third oldest cohort, which comprised 45-59-year-old citizens. However, the hypothesis was verified in 2016 but only partly in 2007. The dependence was not statistically significant.

Because we expected that the middle cohorts are politically more active and have better political knowledge than the young and elderly people, we anticipated that the middle cohorts would less strongly endorse stealth democracy than the youngest and the oldest cohorts (H2.2). However, our

hypothesis was not verified. The endorsement of stealth democracy increased linearly from the youngest age cohort of 18-29-year-olds to the oldest age cohort of 60-75-year-olds. Age was the only socio-demographic variable that explained statistically the endorsement of stealth democracy in 2007 and 2016.

The endorsement of political consumerism depended significantly on gender. Women perceived all devices listed in Table 1 as more useful than men in influencing energy policy. Gender was the only socio-demographic variable for which the endorsement of political consumerism was statistically dependent. The dependence was statistically significant ($p < .05$) in terms of all devices excluding one device in 2007 and three devices in 2016, even if the correlations were low (Pearson' R $-.196$ in 2007 and $-.103$ in 2016, respectively). Even if the proportion of political consumers decreased among women but increased among men, we can conclude that our hypothesis (H 1.3) that women endorse political consumerism more than men, was verified.

Moreover, we hypothesized that men support stealth democracy more than women (H2.3). However, the hypothesis was not verified and the endorsement of stealth democracy was not statistically dependent on gender ($p > .05$).

9. Interrelationship between representative democracy, political consumerism and stealth democracy

We have shown above that the citizens prioritized the involvement of experts and businessmen more than that of elected officials in energy policy-making and they supported political consumerism more than voting in elections as their devices to influence energy policy. But how citizens' attitudes on political consumerism can be related to that of stealth democracy?

We argued that political consumerism and stealth democracy can be seen as alternative modes of political involvement or as different attitudes on conventional policy-making. Thus, we hypothesized

that the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy correlates negatively with the conventional political participation, i.e., voting in elections as a mode of influencing energy policy-making (H3). Stealth democracy may be seen as a reaction among people who feel powerless in the face of the regime, while the supporters of political consumerism are citizens who have a higher sense of civil efficacy. The statements presented in Table 5 epitomizes the sense of civic efficacy in terms of energy policy-making.

In 2007, 44% of citizens agreed (fully or somewhat) with the statement “I am well acquainted with energy issues”, while the proportion (57%) was higher in 2016. In 2007 and 2016, the support for stealth democracy was higher among citizens who felt that they were knowledgeable in energy issues than among those who were not. While the supporters of political consumerism in 2007 felt that they were less knowledgeable about energy issues than non-supporters, the relationship was the reverse in 2016. However, statistically there was no dependence ($p > .05$) between the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy and the level of knowledge about energy issues (however, in the case of stealth democracy in 2016 $p < .001$).

Table 5 here

In 2016, 52% of people agreed with the statement that “citizens’ opinions have not been heard sufficiently in energy policy decisions” (29% disagreed). The Finns’ overall sense of powerlessness has decreased significantly; in 1983-2007, the proportion of those who agreed with this statement was more than 60% (Energy Attitudes 2007). However, the support for both political consumerism and stealth democracy reflects critical attitude on energy policy-making; the supporters of political consumerism and stealth democracy were more sceptical than non-supporters that citizens’ opinions were heard in energy policy-making ($p < .001$).

Generally, the sense of civil efficacy among the general population was low: only 25 % of citizens in 2007 and 24% in 2016 perceived that they could influence the Finnish energy policy by their own

action. However, the endorsement of both political consumerism and stealth democracy increased citizens' civil efficacy, i.e., trust in their possibilities to influence energy policy-making ($p < .001$, however, for stealth democracy in 2007 $p < .05$). The sense of civil efficacy was higher among supporters of political consumerism than among those who approve of stealth democracy.

Energy issues have not played an important role in the Finnish electoral arena (Borg and Moring, 2005, p. 54). In our data the number of citizens who admitted that energy issues had affected their voting decision in the last general election was 25% in 2007 and 23% in 2016. However, among the supporters of both political consumerism ($p < .001$) and stealth democracy ($p < .05$), the effect of energy issues on their voting decision was larger than among non-supporters. Moreover, the supporters of both political consumerism and stealth democracy experienced voting in elections as a useful device for influencing energy policy more generally than non-supporters ($p < .001$).

The dependence between the endorsement of political consumerism and the perceived usefulness of voting in elections was statistically significant ($p < .001$), and the correlation (Pearson's R) was positive, although not high (.337 in 2007 and .365 in 2016). With respect to connection between the endorsement of stealth democracy and the perceived usefulness of voting in elections, the dependence was statistically significant ($p < .001$) but the correlation was low (-.142 in 2007; .260 in 2016).

Thus, political consumerism and stealth democracy cannot be mainly seen as alternative modes for electoral participation but rather as complementary modes, and the hypothesis (H3) was not verified. Moreover, they cannot be seen as detached attitudes on political involvement; the dependence between the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy was statistically significant in 2007 and 2016 ($p < .001$), even if the correlation was rather low (.202 in 2007 and .316 in 2016). In other words, in 2007, 49% of the supporters of stealth democracy also endorsed political consumerism, while in 2016 the proportion was 53%. However, stealth democracy can be seen more as a reaction of people who feel powerless in the face of the regime, while the supporters of political consumerism have a higher sense of civil efficacy, which can be seen in **Table 5**.

Finally, we hypothesized that citizens' support for political consumerism and stealth democracy has increased in the context of government's decreasing political and economic output from 2007 to 2016 (H4). This hypothesis was verified: while the proportion of political consumers increased from 45% to 48%, the number of adherents to stealth democracy grew from 71 % to 72% in 2007-2016.

10. Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of this study was to test Finns' support for two rival interpretations of citizen involvement, political consumerism and stealth democracy, in relation to representative democracy in the context of energy policy. Based on the findings of studies focusing on political consumerism and Finnish electoral studies, we hypothesized that the higher the individual's level of education, the more she or he endorses political consumerism (H1.1), the middle cohorts endorse more political consumerism than the youngest and the oldest cohorts (H1.2), and women more actively endorse political consumerism than men (H1.3). Because we expected stealth democracy to be an opposite attitude to political consumerism with respect to political involvement, the hypotheses dealing with stealth democracy (H2.1-H2.3) were reversed.

The hypotheses dealing with education were falsified. With respect to age, the hypothesis was verified for political consumerism in 2016, but it was only partly supported in 2007, while for stealth democracy the hypothesis was not supported in 2007 and 2016. In terms of **gender**, the hypothesis was verified for political consumerism because women endorsed it more than men. However, with respect to stealth democracy the hypothesis was falsified; men did not support stealth democracy more than women.

Third, we hypothesized that the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy correlates negatively with the electoral participation as a mode of influencing energy policy-making (H3). However, the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy increased citizens'

trust in their possibility to influence energy policy by their own action, the energy issues had a greater effect on the voting decisions of the supporters' than on those of non-supporters, and the supporters experienced voting in general elections as a more useful device in influencing energy policy than non-supporters. Thus, the hypothesis was not verified. Hence, our theoretical conclusion is that political consumerism and stealth democracy cannot be seen as alternative and detached modes for, or attitudes toward electoral participation but rather they can be seen as complementary. However, stealth democracy can be seen more as a reaction of people who feel powerless in the face of the regime, while the supporters of political consumerism have a higher sense of civil efficacy.

The effects of cyclical fluctuations of the Finnish economy (the recession in 1991-1993, 2008-**2016**; economic boom in 1994-2007) and the election funding scandal (2008) on the endorsement of political consumerism and stealth democracy in the context of energy policy have remained minor. This is consistent with previous studies that indicated that the effect of macro-economic conditions on the citizens' attitudes and behavior is minor. Scholars have tested whether societal conditions, such as a booming economy, cause people to be satisfied with government. Although surges in support for government sometimes seem to occur during strong economic times, systematic analyses invariably question the role of economic conditions. Policy performance explains little when it comes to public trust in political institutions (Pharr and Putnam, 2000). However, it has been observed that citizens' perceptions of national economy have more effect on their voting decisions than changes in macro-economic conditions (Evans, 2004).

As the recession reduced citizens' economic resources, their consumption choices were likely based more on the economic consumerism than on political consumerism which reflects more post-materialistic values. This was seen especially in that the endorsement of all the individual means in influencing energy policy decreased after 2007, excluding those that may provide economic benefits, i.e., asking for competitive tenders from electricity companies, contacts with representatives of energy producing firms, and using "green energy". The common denominator for these devices is

more economic consumption than political consumerism, making use of the liberalized competition in the electricity market.

However, measured by the sum variable the proportion of political consumers increased slightly from 45% to 48% %, while the number of adherents to stealth democracy grew from 71 % to 72% in 2007-2016. Thus, the hypothesis (H4) was verified. The popularity of both political consumerism and stealth democracy exceeded markedly the support for representative democracy in influencing energy policy. But how can we explain a **considerable** difference in citizen support for political consumerism and stealth democracy?

Because citizens' perceive political institutions (the government and parliament) as trustworthy in general, and influential in energy policy-making (Ruostetsaari, 2018) political consumerism may not appear to be a particularly good option for conventional political participation among citizens with low civic efficacy because the sense that one can understand political processes and participate in them meaningfully is a prerequisite for political consumerism. Thus, voting in elections makes a difference. The voting turnout increased slightly after the 2007 general election. The protest against the consequences of the recession and the election funding scandal were not presented in the streets, but rather they were channeled to the parliamentary arena as landslide victories of the populist Finns Party in the general elections of 2011 and 2015, which shook the whole political system. It is important to note that the election funding scandal did not concern energy policy-making.

The fact that Finns support clearly more stealth democracy than political consumerism can be explained by the characteristics of the Finnish political culture where high trust, by international standards, in political and legal systems, firms, and technology (i.e., experts) is associated with low civic efficacy, and half-hearted appreciation of democracy (a characteristic of stealth democracy). For instance, according to World Values Survey 2005-2007, Finns' confidence in public sector institutions (parliament, political parties, the national government, the civil service, justice, police, and the military) was highest among 16 older liberal democracies (the second highest in Norway, and

5th highest in Sweden), while their overt approval of a democratic political system was lowest, being highest among Swedes and Norwegians (Norris, 2011, pp. 88-93).

Our finding that citizens' support for stealth democracy exceeds that of representative democracy suggest that they prefer an open and expertise-based decision-making process rather than its outcomes. This stance can be explained by the fact expectations with regard to representation have changed. Rather than working to push interests through and demonstrating ideological camaraderie, elected officials are first and foremost expected to show empathy and presence. Several studies have shown that citizens remain sensitive, or are even more sensitive than before, to the behavior, empathy, or the lack of empathy shown by rulers than they are to the actual content of their decisions (Rosanvallon, 2008). It is evident that there is a need for studies that compare the views of political decision-makers, experts and citizens on policy-making processes of various societal sectors (procedures, participants) with that of policy outputs (content of decisions, effects on various stakeholders).

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Table 1: The respondents to the surveys compared with the whole population (%)

	Respondents in 2007	Population in 2007	Respondents in 2015	Population in 2015
Level of education				
Only basic education	13.4	35.9	9.4	29.8
Upper secondary	41.1	38.3	40.7	40.5
Tertiary	45.5	25.8	49.9	29.7
Field of education				
Pedagogics/teacher training	4.7	3.4	5.0	3.3
Humanities/arts	5.2	4.8	4.3	5.6
Economics or social science	19.5	21.1	19.0	21.0
Natural science	2.1	2.4	3.1	2.7
Engineering	19.4	34.5	27.8	33.0
Agriculture and forestry	7.7	5.4	4.2	4.8
Social and health care	11.0	14.5	13.6	15.5
Service branch	10.0	13.8	8.6	13.5
Other	14.7	0.1	14.5	0.4
Occupational position				
Manager or upper functionary	16.8	13.5	15.9	13.6
Lower functionary	12.9	20.0	10.0	20.1
Entrepreneur	10.0	6.4	8.9	6.3
Blue-collar worker	23.5	20.1	23.5	16.5
Student	5.8	7.2	4.7	6.9
Pensioner	25.5	23.1	31.7	25.1
Other	5.5	9.7	5.3	8.2
Apartment type				
Detached house	50.5	40.1	49.3	39.2
Attached house	19.1	13.8	17.9	13.7
Apartment house	30.4	44.1	32.9	45.2
Other building	0	2.0	0	1.9

Table 2: Usefulness (very or fairly useful) of various devices in influencing the Finnish energy policy in 2007 and 2016 (%)

Device	2007	2016
Instructing children on energy issues	94	88
Choosing scantily spending/"energy-pinching" appliances	92	88
Choosing eco-friendly products	90	87
Walking or cycling instead of driving	90	85
Dropping or supervision of dwelling temperature	84	79
Using so-called green electricity (produced by renewable energy)	77	79
Supervision of the use of electricity in the household	*	79
Reducing private driving by favoring public transport	86	77
Lowering personal consumption level in general	86	77
Asking for competitive tenders from electricity companies	65	74
Reducing heating in leisure residence	*	64
Reducing the use of sauna heated by electricity	63	62
Reducing air travels	68	61
Reducing the use of consumer electronics	67	58
Voting in elections	57	56
Discussion on energy issues with other people/friends	56	48
Acting in civic associations	41	30
Contacts with representatives of energy producing firms	25	27
Writing letters about energy issues to the editors of newspapers	39	24
Writing about energy issues on Internet discussion sites	30	23
Contacts with MPs	28	23
Contacts with public authorities	23	20
Participation in demonstrations	13	10
Radical environmental activism	13	10
N	1157	1308
*= was not inquired		

Table 3: The proportion of the citizenry who perceived very or somewhat important the principles concerning the process of energy policy-making in 2007 and 2016 (%)

Principle	2007	2016
Decision should be announced as openly as possible	96	95
Experts should be in charge of the drafting of decisions	96	94
Societal effects of decisions should be taken widely into account	93	94
Decisions should take account of various interest groups	67	69
Environmental effects of decisions should be taken widely into account	95	92
Those politically responsible to the constituency should be in charge of decision-making	54	56
The drafting process of decisions should be open	90	89
Citizens should be able to influence decisions	75	75
Experts should be in charge of decision-making	91	89
Representatives of firms should take part in decision-making	62	66
Business organizations should play a central role in decision-making	41	48
Decisions should be made by consensus based on negotiations	65	64
Environmental organizations should play a central role in decision-making	54	53
Energy policy should be determined free of governmental direction	29	32
N	1189	1349

Table 4: The proportion of supporters for political consumerism and stealth democracy among various socio-economic groups in 2007 and 2016 (%)

	2007		2016	
	Political consumerism	Stealth democracy	Political consumerism	Stealth democracy
<u>Basic education</u>				
Elementary school	48	78	45	79
Primary school	41	80	45	80
High school	46	77	51	78
	p>.05	p>.05	p>.05	p>.05
<u>Vocational education</u>				
No vocational education at all	52	74	42	75
Vocational course	49	82	54	82
Vocational school	44	79	43	78
Polytechnic	40	78	50	81
University	47	76	49	78
	p>.05	p>.05	p>.05	p>.05
<u>Age group</u>				
18-29	43	72	46	73
30-44	45	74	48	75
45-59	46	79	49	76
60-75	45	83	47	83
	p>.05	p<.05	p>.05	p<.05
<u>Gender</u>				
Men	35	78	43	77
Women	55	78	53	80
	p<.001	p>.05	p<.001	p>.05
N	1189	1189	1349	1349

Table 5: Agreement (fully or somewhat) with the statements epitomizing the sense of civic efficacy among supporters and non-supporters of political consumerism and stealth democracy in 2007 and 2016 (%)

Statement	2007				2016			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
I am well acquaintant with energy issues	41	48	46	42	60	55	60	49
Energy issues affected my voting decision in last general election	32	19	26	23	33	13	23	21
I am able to influence the Finnish energy policy by means of my own activities	37	15	27	19	35	13	27	16
Citizens' opinions have not been heard sufficiently when making energy policy decisions	*	*	*	*	60	45	55	40
Voting in elections is useful in influencing energy policy	69	47	61	45	69	43	60	40
N	501	614	886	247	604	664	989	270

*= not inquired

A= Supporters of political consumerism

B= Non-supporters of political consumerism

C= Supporters of stealth democracy

D= Non-supporters of stealth democracy