Referendums from a different angle: why a new typology is capturing more?

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Abstract

While much research has concentrated on the causes, consequences and process of the referendum, the types of popular votes have been categorized so far only along the institutional features (binding vs. non-binding, mandatory vs. facultative, top-down vs. bottom-up). This paper attempts to fill this void and proposes an alternative typology based on the substance of the referendum - the voted topic. The key argument is that this kind of typology enables comparisons across countries, across political systems and across different timelines, but within one topic, thus, serving as a powerful analytical tool. Furthermore, our typology allows to map the referendum use throughout the history, identifying significant trends and patterns. The typology is based on the analysis of 621 nation-wide referendums held on the European continent in the period between 1793 and 2017, covering democracies, nations in transition, as well as authoritarian regimes.

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature on direct democracy, the discourse on it is truly extensive and ample. Notwithstanding, four main directions of the research can be identified. One strand of literature examines the causes for introduction of referendums, inter alia general political disenchantment of citizens, low confidence in political institutions and politicians, declining interest in politics with falling turnout and decrease in party membership (Budge, 1996; Setälä and Schiller, 2009; Smith, 2009; Norris, 2011; Newton, 2012). A different strand of literature documents the consequences of the use of the referendum, namely its effects on trust, legitimacy, political participation, overall satisfaction with how democracy works (Kriesi, 2005; Geissel and Newton, 2012; Setälä and Schiller, 2012; Geissel and Joas, 2013; Qvortrup, 2013; Gherghina, 2017; Kern, 2017). A third body of literature looks at the process of the referendum: what are important factors in its design, what is the role of political parties and party cues, how does media campaign and saliency of the issue affect the outcome of the popular vote, what is the influence of the popularity of the government (Lupia, 1994; Siune, Svensson and Tonsgaard, 1994; Franklin, 2002; Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002; de Vreese, 2004; LeDuc, 2009; Bernhard, 2012; Silagadze and Gherghina, 2017). A fourth strand of literature is represented by global studies on direct democracy that provide a comprehensive overview of the use of the referendum instrument in the world, pointing out some regional peculiarities (Butler and Ranney, 1994b; LeDuc, 2003; Altman, 2011; Qvortrup, 2014b).

Simultaneously, we have the literature on the other hand that deals (at least partially) with the typology of direct democracy in general and referendum in particular (Uleri, 1996; Beramendi et al., 2008; Kaufmann, Büchi and Braun, 2010; Altman, 2011; Svensson, 2011). However, all these typologies are designed exclusively around the institutional characteristics of the popular vote (e.g. binding vs. non-binding, mandatory vs. facultative, top-down vs. bottom-up). This paper is an attempt to bridge these two strands of the research claiming that a new typology based on the core of the referendum - its topic - can contribute to the better understanding of how this tool functions across countries, political systems and times. Besides, this typology serves as a tool in identifying the trajectories of referendum use throughout the history – by democrats as well as by autocrats.

The first section reviews the existing definitions of direct democracy and the prevailing institutional typologies of it. This is followed by the discussion how the new typology can be beneficial in theoretical, methodological and empirical respects. The third section presents the undertaken steps in developing this typology, describes the data and illustrates its practical merits. The concluding section wraps up by looking at the potential implications of the new approach and avenues for future research.
Existing typologies and their limitations

Despite the ever increasing use of referendums worldwide and respectively growing academic interest towards this subject, there is, however, no universal consensus neither on the definition of direct democracy in general nor on the referendum term in particular. And when it comes to typologies, it becomes, indeed, very complicated.

To begin with, Kaufmann et al. (Kaufmann, Büchi and Braun, 2010, p. 7) define direct democracy as ‘the right of citizens to be directly involved in political decision-making’. For Budge (1996, p. 35) direct democracy is ‘a regime in which citizens as a whole debate and vote on the most important decisions, and where their vote determines the action to be taken’. Altman (2011, p. 7) defines a mechanism of direct democracy as ‘a publicly recognized institution wherein citizens decide or emit their opinion on issues - other than through legislative and executive elections - directly at the ballot box through universal and secret suffrage’.

As for the term ‘referendum’, Uleri (1996, p. 2) defines it as ‘the opportunity for electors to participate in a decision-making process by voting on an issue more or less specific and determined’. Moreover, he adds that ‘there is a large variety of popular votes called referendums’ (Uleri, 1996, p. 2). Thus, in accordance to Butler and Ranney (1994a, p. 1) ‘in a referendum, a mass electorate votes on some public issues’. For Williams and Hume (2010, p. 5) ‘a referendum is held when people cast a vote to accept or reject a question of law or policy, such as whether to amend a constitution or a piece of legislation’.

Speaking about typologies one should keep in mind that many scholars dealing with direct democracy suggest their own classifications, often deriving from experiences and peculiarities in their own countries. As Uleri (1996, pp. 3–8) illustrates it, Möckli distinguished between six types of issue-voting and Suksi differentiated between 12 types of referendums, Auer suggested five types of referendums and three types of initiatives, Magleby identified four types of direct legislation. For Uleri the crucial distinguishing criterion refers to the promoter of a popular vote: an ‘initiative’ is when a number of voters promote a popular vote, and a ‘referendum’ is when another agent promotes a popular vote. He also suggests the term ‘optional referendum’ for all other non-mandatory votes and introduces a classification of decision-promoting and decision-controlling popular votes (Uleri, 1996, pp. 9–11).

Another typology was developed later by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). The classification of four broad types of direct democracy was introduced - referendums, citizens’ initiatives, agenda initiatives and recall. In accordance to Uleri, Beramendi et al. (2008, pp. 43–45) distinguish between mandatory and optional referendums. The second type of direct democratic procedures are the citizens’ initiative and the citizen-demanded referendum. With a citizens’ initiative (also called a ‘popular initiative’), a number of citizens present a political proposal (e.g. draft legislation), obtain a required number of signatures for its support and thereby force a popular vote (referendum) on the issue. A citizen-demanded referendum is an optional referendum initiated by a number of citizens. This type of referendum can refer to existing laws - the abrogative referendum; or to a new piece of legislation - the rejective referendum (Beramendi et al., 2008, pp. 61–62). Agenda initiative is the only procedure that does not necessarily lead to a referendum. The agenda initiative places an issue on the political agenda and requires the legislature – to consider and/or act on a proposal (Beramendi et al. 2008: 83). For instance, according to the Treaty of Lisbon, a proposal that obtains the signatures of 1 million EU citizens would require that the European Commission ‘consider’ the issue. In Austria, however, 100,000 signatures in support of an initiative are enough for an issue to be debated in the parliament (Svensson, 2011, pp. 7–8). The final category of direct democracy debated in the IDEA Handbook is recall. This category is often not included as a direct democracy procedure, because recall does not deal with popular votes on political issues, rather with elected representatives. Recall is much rarer in practice than referendums or initiatives. A recall process begins as a citizens’ initiative with a petition containing a minimum number of
signatures asking the representative to step back or demanding the abolition of the whole institution.

Another classification of the direct democracy practices was elaborated by the Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe (IRI). IRI’s concept of direct democracy includes votes on substantial issues, not on people. In this view, recall votes do not belong to direct democracy. Furthermore, according to IRI, direct democracy should empower people, not governments. Consequently, the distinction between top-down and bottom-up procedures becomes crucial. For IRI, plebiscites ‘are procedures which citizens cannot initiate, and whose use lies exclusively within the control of the authorities. This distinction between plebiscites and referendums is fundamental for a proper understanding of direct democracy’ (Kaufmann, Büchi and Braun, 2010, p. 196). According to IRI, the concept of direct democracy should consist of initiatives and referendums, whereas plebiscites should be seen as a part of representative democracy (Kaufmann, Büchi and Braun, 2010, p. 197).

The most recent academic typology of direct democracy has been developed by David Altman. He provides a typology based on four distinctions:

(i) The first dichotomy is whether the mechanism is legally regulated by law or the constitution. If yes, it is called mandatory, if not - facultative (Uleri and Beramendi used the term of ‘optional referendum’);

(ii) The second dimension involves whether the result of the vote is absolute. Altman at this point follows the common terminology and refers to a dichotomy between binding versus consultative votes;

(iii) The third criterion refers to the purpose of the procedure: whether it is aimed to alter the status quo - proactive, or attempts to sustain the status quo – reactive;

(iv) The final distinction deals with the trigger of direct democratic procedure. If a referendum is initiated by the political establishment it is labeled as top-down. If a referendum is triggered by a group of citizens, Altman labels it as bottom-up or citizen-initiated (Altman, 2011, pp. 8–9).

Svensson suggests replacing the confusing term of ‘plebiscites’ that is often negatively related with the more neutral ‘popular vote called by the authorities’. Moreover, he attempts to simplify the typology of direct democratic votes to include only four types of votes, that were covered by all authors above. These types are: mandatory referendums, popular votes called by authorities, popular votes called by citizens (on a newly passed or existing law) and citizens’ initiatives (Svensson, 2011, pp. 16–17).

These are the most comprehensive typologies elaborated so far. Additionally, various authors, developed their own (usually rather short) categorization based on the type of referendums analyzed in their research. For instance, Christin and Hug (2002, p. 591), studying mainly referendums on the EU integration, differentiate between required (or mandatory), non-required passive (launched by the government), non-required active referendums (launched by actors outside government). Tridimas (2007, p. 677) highlights three main institutional features of a referendum: binding vs. consultative; on constitutional vs. post-constitutional issue (e.g. on ordinary laws like taxation), required by the constitution (mandatory) vs. non-required.

As one can easily notice, all these above illustrated typologies are based on the institutional characteristics of the referendum (binding vs. non-binding, mandatory vs. facultative, top-down vs. bottom-up). However, they do not capture the whole picture around the referendum process, they do not address one important question, namely which policies are subjected in the end to the popular vote, and which – not, whether there are some patterns behind it. If we take a look on the trend of
the referendum use throughout the history, one fact becomes evident: certain issues are put on vote in certain times (see the charts below). Thus, mapping the use of the referendums can be seen as the first step in understanding what are the determinants behind the referendum initiation and what factors play a decisive role. This goes back to Arend Lijphart’ conclusion that the question of when certain issues are subjected to referendums cannot be answered satisfactorily (Lijphart, 1984, p. 209). More than 30 years later Anckar (2017, p. 13) summarizes: “It remains therefore a vital task for future referendum research to find out the precise conditions for referendum execution and to specify more than hitherto the actual triggering factors”. In order to fill the void this paper suggest a new approach: a typology that is based on the topic, the substance of a referendum.

Figure 1: The Evolution of Policy Topics in Referendums in Europe (1793-2016)

Figure 2: A Snapshot of Policy Topics in Referendums in Europe (1970-2016)
Towards a new typology

The fact that typologies do matter is broadly uncontested. Across fields typologies provide an important tool with multiple functions, inter alia assisting in ‘forming concepts, refining measurement, exploring dimensionality, and organizing explanatory claims’ (Collier, LaPorte and Seawright, 2012, p. 217). Admittedly, the topic-oriented approach is not a complete novelty. It has been partially applied by numerous studies on the European integration, where scholars analysed EU/NATO membership referendums - separately from other types of referendums - and across different countries, finding certain similarities and highlighting country-specific aspects (Hug and Sciarini, 2000; Hug, 2003; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2004; Hobolt, 2007, 2009; Svensson, 2007; Tridimas, 2007; Mendez, Mendez and Triga, 2014; Qvortrup, 2016). In a similar way, constitutional referendums received distinct attention (Tierney, 2012; Anckar, 2014). Tierney (2012) takes a theoretical approach to the question how the instrument of referendum is used for constitutional changes, what is the role of elites and external influences and how it can be made more democratic in times of constitutional transformation. Alone since 1987 around 44 % of the 194 instances of constitutional change has been subjected to the popular vote (Widner, 2008, p. 1525). Following the increase in constitutional referendums, Anckar (2014) tries to answer the question why 98 countries have provisions for mandatory or facultative referendums in case of constitutional amendments whereas 95 other countries do not, accentuating the importance of electoral system and cultural heritage. However, one should make clear that these two kinds of referendums overlap, since many of popular votes on European integration were also constitutional referendums, as they required constitutional amendments (or were mandatory since concerned the issue of national sovereignty). Furthermore, there are some isolated studies on fiscal/budget referendums and their effects, mainly in Switzerland and the United States (Matsusaka, 2000; Feld and Matsusaka, 2003; Kriesi, 2012). Qvortrup (2014a) takes a distinct perspective looking at ethnonational referendums - primarily the independence referendums. He explores what were the triggering mechanisms for these kinds of referendums and how they contributed to more peace or more ethnic conflict in different regions throughout the history.

Having illustrated so far how referendums have been approached hitherto, a major gap in the literature becomes evident. To date, there is no comprehensive study investigating what kind of referendums de facto have taken place throughout the history and how they can be clustered thematically. This is vital for the comprehensive understanding of the whole referendum process since it serves as a starting point in elucidating what are the circumstances or conditions that favour or hinder the launching of direct democratic procedures.

Every topic put on the popular vote brings with itself a certain package of attributes that are characteristic for the specific art of the issue. In concrete, referendums on abortion or a new nuclear plant or EU/NATO membership set free completely different argumentation lines, resulting in different modes of campaigning and levels of saliency, different actors participating, different level of pressure for political parties, different degrees of emotions and sentiments involved in the whole process from the very beginning of the discussion whether to put an issue on the vote or not through the campaign and up to the outcome and its interpretation. These factors deriving from the very nature of the policy type seem to serve at least as a complementary tool for the better understanding of why some issues are put to a referendum and how the vote is influenced or decided. To make it clear, I am not arguing that institutional attributes are of minor importance, as Altman (2011, p. 18) would put it: ‘the devil is in the details’, or in words of Kaufman at al. ‘design determines the quality’ (Kaufmann, Büchi and Braun, 2010, p. 85). The proposed typology is seen as an additional instrument that sheds light on the very core of each referendum – the topic, the policy subjected to the vote.

The classification into topics adds a new dimension in the understanding of complexity of each popular vote. It offers a more precise and complete picture of referendums taking into account all
the nuances that are characteristic for each topic. This typology is beneficial in a three-fold way: theoretically, methodologically and empirically.

At theoretical level, this alternative topic-based typology serves as an innovative analytical framework that can be used in order to map the policies put on ballot across the world. Thus, it allows to observe what kind of issues were dominating the public discourse in a society, on a continent, in a certain period of time. A mapping of policies across the continent is necessary in order to look behind the scenes and understand how and why the referendum tool has been used. Since mechanisms of triggering a referendum process, forces involved - parties, institutions, civil society, saliency can differ according to the type of policy on ballot.

Methodologically, this typology offers a new approach for clustering referendums on the basis of their content, their core. This classification allows comparisons within the same topic across the countries, across different times in order to detect patterns and observe trajectories. Using this typology and the developed data base one has the possibility for instance to compare all referendums on health or education issues held since the beginning of referendum history until nowadays on the European continent.

This typology accounts for contextual explanations in the referendum process that go beyond historical or country-specific peculiarities. For instance, one could observe how political leaders from different countries ‘copied’ or benefited from the experiences with direct democracy in their neighbouring states (mimetism/contagion effect). This method elucidates topic-specific determinants and enables to see a bigger picture of referendums’ use. This typology (along with the developed dataset) not only allows to test whether interconnection between topics takes place but enables intercultural, interstate comparisons through different time lines and different political systems and, thus, contributes to a wide applicability of the received results. The subject-oriented approach can be used as an additional toolkit, offering a change of perspective for referendum studies in the future.

Empirically, this will be the first attempt to analyse the policy types of referendums in a comparative approach considering the popular votes on the whole European continent since 1793. Developing a type-tailored analysis serves as a significant endeavour promoting the thorough understanding of how and when referendums occur, what are they influenced by and how they can be won. This knowledge has also policy-making dimension, building a bridge between academics and policymakers by identifying common rules, drawing recommendations and lessons from prior experiences on one specific topic throughout the history.

**Topic-based typology and the data**

The typology has been developed inductively. I have scrutinized all referendums that have taken place on the European continent since the beginning of the referendum history until nowadays, covering more than two centuries (1793-2017). The data encompasses 621 nation-wide referendums held in 48 countries: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Soviet Union, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom. The referendums in Switzerland are not included due to the fact that only in this country around 600 referendums were conducted in the same period that would distort the overall results. Switzerland with its longest and most intensive tradition of direct democracy is rather an exception than a rule in Europe. Alone in year 2014 twelve different issues were put on vote, whereas, for instance, in Finland, only two referendums were held throughout the history of the country - in 1931 and in 1994. Furthermore, the referendums in conflict or
internationally non-acknowledged areas are not included (Donezk, Krim, Ossetia, Abkhasia, Northern Cyprus etc). In addition, if a country at the moment of a popular vote was a part of a different state, it is not included either – e.g. Romania in 1864 (where referendum on Constitution and electoral law was held) was officially part of the Ottoman Empire and, thus, excluded from the dataset. However, the popular votes that led to a formation of new (internationally acknowledged) actors on the international arena are incorporated: votes on independence from the other state (e.g. the wave of referendums in post-Soviet countries in 1991 - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Ukraine); referendums held in the course of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia - Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia; or the Norwegian referendum in 1905 on the dissolution of Union with Sweden. Overall, there is a wide diversity of countries presented in terms of political heritage, comprising former/no more existing states (Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union), states with the longest history of democracy (e.g. San Marino - since 1600, Liechtenstein - since 1921), consolidated democracies (Denmark, France, Italy etc.), nations in transit (Albania, Georgia, Macedonia etc.) as well as authoritarian regimes (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia etc.). This is essential for the later stage of the research in order to see whether autocrats and democrats use the tool of referendum differently.

After having a look on all the referendums conducted so far, 13 broad categories according to their policy field were identifies:

(1) Constitutional Reform & New Constitution
In this category are included all referendums on adoption of a new constitution or on approval of constitutional reform on major changes (for instance, the latest controversial constitutional referendum in Turkey). All other cases where certain constitutional issues were put on ballot, are clustered according to the field of policy. Since, for instance, in Ireland all referendums belong formally to “constitutional referendums”. However, they refer to diverse policy fields: from abortion and same-sex marriage to EU Treaties. Thus, I look in detail what was the amendment about and categorize it according to the topic. Dissolving this category of “constitutional referendums” helps to get a more nuanced overview of different policies that have ever been voted on.

(2) State Formation
This category is applied for all referendums on independence (e.g. a series of independence referendums in former Soviet republics in the early 1990s, French referendum in 1961 on self-determination of Algeria, Norwegian referendum in 1905 on dissolution of Union with Sweden); referendums on whether a certain territory should stay the part of a state (Croatian referendum in 1991 on remaining within Yugoslavia, Iceland referendum in 1918 on becoming an independent kingdom under Danish Crown ), or become a part of another state (Austrian referendum in 1938 on reunification with the German Reich, Danish referendum in 1920 on acceptance of North Schleswig); referendums on a new territorial composition of a state (Cyprus referendum in 2004 on Foundation of a Reunified Republic of Cyprus); or on the continued existence within the same territory (Moldovan referendum on preservation of independence in 1994, referendum on continued existence of the Soviet Union in 1991).

(3) Political System
This cluster encompasses popular votes on a broad design of society, inter alia in regard to the state form: monarchy or republic (Albania 1997, Greece 1935, Italy 1946); distribution of powers (Belarus referendum in 1995 on president’s power to dissolve parliament, Moldovan referendum in 1999 on assigning more powers to the President, Estonia 1933 Introducing presidential regime, Hungary 1990 direct election of President Liechtenstein 2012 on limiting veto powers of the prince, Italy 2001 on greater legislative powers to the regions); introduction/abolishment of political institutions or ways of political participation (Iceland 2012 introduction of initiatives, Azerbaijan 2016 Introduction of Vice-presidency; Ireland 2013 abolishment of Senate; Ukraine 2000 establishing a second parliamentary
chamber); on major political issues (Liechtenstein 1968 on women’s suffrage; Spain 1976 on political reforms).

(4) Electoral System
This category is comprised of referendums on more technical issues around the electoral system, such as voting age/rights (Luxembourg 2015 lowering voting age from 18 to 16, Ireland 1984 voting right for foreign citizens); age of candidates (Azerbaijan 2016 abolishment of minimum age for Presidency); number of seats in the Parliament (Romania 2009 reducing the number of parliamentarians to maximum 300); on thresholds/quorums (Liechtenstein 1973 introduction of a 8% threshold for parliamentary elections, San Marino 2015 abolishing 25% quorum for referendums); scheduling elections (Georgia 2008 on parliamentary elections in spring 2008, Russia 1993 early presidential elections; Turkey 1988 early municipal elections); type of electoral system (Andorra 1982 Electoral system: majoritarian, proportional or mixed, UK 2011 Alternative vote electoral system); voting procedure (Bulgaria 2016 introduction of compulsory voting, Slovakia 2010 introduction of electronic voting, San Marino 1996 reduction of preference votes from three to one).

(5) Interior Policy
This type of referendums is composed of popular votes on different kinds of internal legislation that refer to the rule of law in a country: for instance, basic rights (Liechtenstein 1985 equal rights for men and women, Azerbaijan 2009 on protection of children’s rights), laws on citizenship (Hungary 2004 on dual citizenship, Latvia 1998 abolition of facilitated naturalisation), certain regulations (Malta 2015 on spring bird hunting, Liechtenstein 2006 on dog legislation, Sweden 1955 traffic regulations), legal framework in various areas (Denmark 1963 on land law reform, Liechtenstein 1950 weapons law); certain policies concerning the state organisation (Austria 2013 on general conscription, Italy 1997 abolition of Ministry for Agriculture and Fishery; Portugal 1998 on regionalization; Slovakia 2010 limitation of parliamentary immunity).

(6) Foreign Affairs
This category includes all topics of inter-state relations, such as: border/territory issues (Poland 1946 Borders with Germany and Baltic States, Denmark 1916 Sale of West Indian Islands to the USA, Slovenia 2010 Arbitration procedure for defining the border with Croatia); different kinds of international arrangements (France 1962 Evian Accords ending Algerian war, Lithuania 1992 withdrawal of Soviet Troops, Slovakia 1997 on locating foreign military base, Iceland 2011 state guarantee for the Icesave compensation fund); international collaboration (Belarus 1995 economic collaboration with the Russian Federation; Ireland 2001 ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Luxembourg 1919 Economic Union with France or Belgium). However, this cluster is clearly dominated by referendums related to the issues of EU integration and NATO membership - over 30 popular votes, inter alia: Norway 1972 Accession to European Economic Community, Denmark 2000 Introduction of Euro, Czech Republic 2003 on EU membership, Netherlands 2005 on EU Constitution, Ireland 2009 Treaty of Lisbon, San Marino 2013 EU accession negotiations, Netherlands 2016 Association agreement between the EU and Ukraine, Hungary 2016 EU migrant quota, Georgia 2008 NATO membership).

(7) Economy
Under this category fall all the issues that are related to economic/financial measures (Greece 2015 on accepting bailout conditions of EC, ECB and IMF; Poland 1997 economic reforms); distribution of resources (Liechtenstein 1970 Threelfold increase of revenue sharing between municipalities; Lithuania 1996 Allocating half of the state budget for social issues, health and culture, Liechtenstein 1961 on tax law), Ownership issues (Iceland 2012 public ownership of natural resources, Italy 2011 repealing law on partial water privatization, Poland 1996 privatization program); on public expenses (San Marino 2016 capping public sector salaries at 100,000€, Slovakia 2010 Ceiling price for official vehicles, Liechtenstein 1980 construction of an art museum for 17.4 million francs).
(8) Environment
This category includes mainly votes on constructing or maintenance of nuclear plants (Austria 1974 On the peaceful use of the Zwentendorf nuclear power plant, Bulgaria 2013 building a new nuclear plant), as well as general policies concerning the environment (Italy 2016 Oil and natural gas drilling, Italy 1990 Prohibition of the use of pesticides in agriculture, 1967 Protection of Alpine regions and zoning of mountains area, Liechtenstein 2002 on Sustainable transport policy).

(9) Health
Here are covered referendums on certain policies related to health issues (Finland 1931 alcohol policy, Liechtenstein 2009 Tabacco Control Act, Italy 1993 Legalising the consumption of drugs), as well as general issues around the healthcare system (Azerbaijan 2016 Health protection in labour law, Hungary 2008 Abolition of fees for ambulatory treatments, Hungary 2004 no privatization of healthcare system).

(10) Education
This type includes referendums on higher education (Hungary 2008 Abolition of fees for higher public education) and school policies (Estonia 1923 Restoring voluntary religious education in state schools, Slovakia 2015 Children’s right to skip classes involving education on sex and euthanasia, Liechtenstein 2009 school reform).

(11) Family & Ethics & Moral Issues
This broad category is composed of referendums related to minority rights (Azerbaijan 2016 Disability rights, Belarus 1995 Equal status of Russian and Belarusian languages); definition of marriage/legalizing same-sex marriages (Croatia 2013, Ireland 2015 etc), divorce law (Malta 2011), abortion (Portugal 2007), death penalty (Belarus 1996) and other moral issues (Italy 2005 on embryonic research).

(12) Labour & Social
Here are treated the referendums on labour regulations (Italy 2003 Abrogation of the restriction on protection against unjustified dismissals to enterprises with more than 15 employees, Liechtenstein 1931 unemployment insurance law, Slovenia 2011 on part-time work law, San Marino 2013 linking salary increase to inflation, San Marino 2008 Abolition of temporary employment contracts); pensions (Latvia 1999 Abolition of the retirement system reform, Sweden 1957 pension reform), on trade unions (Italy 2000 Abrogation of automatic salary deduction for trade unions and worker associations), on social policies (Liechtenstein 1967 Increasing child benefits and family allowances, Liechtenstein 2000 public housing law, Poland 1996 Property restitution).

(13) Media
The last category encompasses all the referendums on media regulation, including broadcasting rights (Italy 1995 Repealing the law allowing advertising breaks during television programs, Slovenia 2010 Law of the Slovenian public broadcaster RTV Slovenia, Italy 1997 Abrogation of the Association of Journalists, Liechtenstein 1930 Media law, Slovakia 2010 Change of the Press Code by removing politician’s automatic right to reply).

These categories are defined very broadly in order to encompass a large variety of referendums and simplify their categorization. However, several methodological difficulties are evident. Decisions had to be taken about what policy does a question belong to mostly. For instance, questions on abortion, divorce or death penalty belong not only to moral, ethical issue but also to constitution, interior legislation of a country. Similarly, nuclear energy is not only about environment, but also economic costs. However, following this logic, every single referendum would have been in different categories, since even electoral reforms require economic resources for implementing it (administration, organizational costs). In order to avoid the double categorization of one referendum, intercoder reliability test was conducted (Cronbach’s alpha=0.837).
These 13 categories can be clustered under four main umbrella terms:

![Diagram showing clustering of categories]

If we include a dimension of complexity, the typology can be illustrated as follows below:

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