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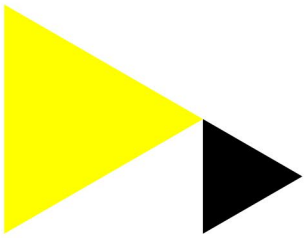

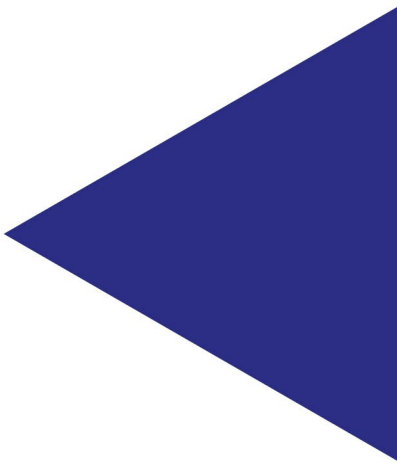

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'Democracy always comes first': adolescents' views on decision-making in everyday life and political democracy

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ABSTRACT

Research shows adolescents to be positively oriented towards democracy, but little is known about what it actually means to them and what their views are on decision-making in both everyday situations and political democracy. To gain insight into these aspects of adolescents' democratic views, we have interviewed 40 Dutch adolescents from second grade of different types of high school. Potential conflict between various democratic principles prevalent in everyday life situations was discussed and compared to how they view decision-making in political democracy. The results of our qualitative study showed that adolescents' views on issues concerning collective decision-making in everyday situations are quite rich and reflect different models of democracy (majoritarian, consensual, and deliberative). Moreover, how adolescents deal with tensions between democratic principles in everyday life situations varies. While some adolescents combine several principles (for instance, majority rule as a last resort after trying to find broader consensus), other adolescents tend to strictly focus on only one of these principles. Adolescents' views on political democracy, however, are rather limited and one-dimensional. Those adolescents who seemed to have a more explicit picture of political democracy often preferred a strict focus on majority rule, neglecting minority interests.

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For the stability of a democratic society, it is of great importance that new generations develop democratic orientations. Yet, during the past 15 years, studies have raised questions about the orientations of new generations towards democracy and specific aspects thereof, such as political interests, willingness to vote, freedom of speech, and collective decision-making. Scholars claim that new generations are largely preoccupied with their own lives and interests, and are therefore less focused on participation in public spheres and the common good (Galston 2001; Putnam 2000; Ribeiro et al. 2015).

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Notwithstanding the concerns raised, some research conducted in recent years shows that many adolescents still appreciate democracy and support underlying values such as tolerance and freedom of speech (Schulz et al. 2010). In general, they prefer democratic regimes above undemocratic ones and democratic ways of decision-making with friends, in school, and in leisure organizations (Helwig 1998). Although adolescents seem positively oriented towards democracy, a more detailed picture of their views about democratic ways of decision-making is still lacking. For instance, adolescents are often asked in studies whether or not they agree with democracy and/or freedom rights, but these studies do not shed light on adolescents' views in situations in which they are confronted with competing democratic principles (e.g. Helwig and Turiel 2002; Schulz et al. 2010; Torney-Purta 2001). Notably, the studies carried out focused primarily on political democracy (i.e. parliament, presidency, and political parties), while previous research has shown that adolescents have limited knowledge of and experiences in such arenas (Galston 2001; Helwig 1998). Some studies have focused on decision-making in situations familiar to adolescents, but participants in these studies are drawn predominantly from the higher socio-economic milieu, which leaves differences related to education levels or the socio-economic milieu out of the picture (e.g. Helwig and Kim 1999; Helwig et al. 2003). Other studies have revealed the significant impact of education on adolescents' democratic views, and have claimed this as a stronger explanation for differences between young people than background characteristics such as gender, age, religiosity, and ethnicity (e.g. Flanagan et al. 2005; Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012; Schulz et al. 2010).

This article reports on a qualitative study of the democratic views of adolescents from different educational tracks. We aimed at offering a situated understanding of adolescents' democratic views by focusing on the different meanings of democratic decision-making in the context of both everyday life situations and political democracy. Our interviews with adolescents have provided in-depth insights into adolescent preferences regarding the collective decision-making processes they encounter in different situations where aspects of democracy are at stake. We focused on familiar situations in their daily lives in which they interact with others, such as at home, with friends, and at school (hereafter 'everyday situations'), and on adolescents' views about decision-making in a *political* democracy, meaning the institutions that constitute the democratic characteristics of the state, such as parliament, the presidency, the constitution, and political parties. This approach enabled us to compare adolescents' subjective views on democratic decision-making in different situations. Moreover, interviewing adolescents from divergent socio-economic and sociocultural backgrounds allowed us to explore the differences between various groups.

The relevance of our study lies particularly in the fact that adolescence is a formative period in a person's political socialization (Jennings 2007; Sears and Levy 2003). The views and orientations developed during this period affect a person's beliefs throughout the rest of his or her life. Furthermore, a large amount of research has pointed out that young people to an extent base their attitudes towards politics and democracy on experiences with democracy in everyday life, such as discussions and decision-making in class and whether adults are willing to listen to their perspectives (Flanagan 2013; Helwig and Turiel 2002; Sapiro 2004). Everyday experiences can influence how they view democracy, and this influence can have a lasting effect.

Models of democracy

Democracy is not a univocal concept and also democratic decision-making can take various forms. At least three models of democracy can be distinguished: majoritarian democracy, consensual democracy, and deliberative democracy (Dahl 1956; Goodin 2008; Held 2006; Hendriks 2010; Keane 2009; Lijphart 1999). Within all three models of democracy, discussing viewpoints is considered a central aspect, but the role of this discussion differs to a large extent. Selecting one from several competing options stands central in the majoritarian model of democracy. Discussion is supposed to inform people about the available options. Therefore, discussion is considered an instrument that enables people to voice their viewpoints and to persuade others, after which 'the winner takes all' via a voting procedure. In the consensual model of democracy, the focus is on finding agreement via negotiation involving as many participants as possible and thereby taking as many minority interests into account as possible. Discussion is basically negotiation to find a compromise. In the deliberative model of democracy, preferences of actors become fluid and participants are focused upon developing new perspectives and finding win–win options by deliberation. Discussion is here the method that is used to come to a decision. By discussing all given viewpoints objectively, people must come to an understanding about what for all people involved the most reasonable option is.

Coming to a decision through voting, negotiating, or deliberating confronts people with contradictory principles, particularly between freedom and equality, majority rule and minority interests, and the power of numbers or the power of arguments. Within these three models of democracy, no fixed balance between democratic principles can be found. The balance can shift depending on the time, place, and preferences of the individuals involved (Thomassen 2007). However, because of a focus on one decision-making procedure, each of the respective models implies tensions between certain competing principles in particular. In the majoritarian model, potential conflicts primarily exist between majority vote, the power of arguments, and interests of minorities. In the consensual model, potential conflicts mainly exist between negotiating agreements, the necessity of collective decision-making, and the power of arguments. In the deliberative model, potential conflicts between deliberation, power of numbers, and the necessity to come to a collective decision are accentuated. A more comprehensive understanding of democracy would therefore suggest that several of these principles are taken into account when arguing about aspects of democracy. To observe a deeper and more complex understanding of Dutch adolescents' democratic orientations, these models of democracy and their encompassing potentially conflicting principles were used as a theoretical frame for this research.

Orientations towards democracy and decision-making

Some research has been conducted about the question what adolescents know about democracy and how they feel about it. The few available studies of adolescents' views on democracy indicate that they on average have only limited insight into the meaning of this concept. Many adolescents are not able to define democracy or provide a coherent description of it. Those who are able to define democracy, moreover, typically do so in

terms of such characteristics as individual rights and freedoms, democratic representation, majority rule, and/or civic equality (Husfeldt and Nikolova 2003; Flanagan 2013; Flanagan et al. 2005). Only a small group of adolescents have been shown to be able to provide a more comprehensive account of the concept of democracy by mentioning several key characteristics, relating these to each other and explaining why they constitute a democracy (De Groot 2013; Sigel and Hoskins 1981). In other international research, adolescents were shown to be able to judge what is good and bad for democracy when confronted with statements about political institutions (Torney-Purta 2001). Comprehension of democracy seems to be related to the ability to understand what a democratic way of dealing with a situation entails. An older study among adolescents in the USA has shown that those who were able to provide a more comprehensive account of democracy also provided more often a democratic solution for a problem as opposed to a more self-centred approach (Sigel and Hoskins 1981).

All in all, adolescents appear to have trouble defining democracy despite having some basic knowledge of what it entails. The inability of many adolescents to give a definition of democracy that encompasses several characteristics does not mean, however, that they are indifferent to the existence of democracy. An international study comprising 38 countries showed that the overwhelming majority of adolescents from all participating countries (strongly) concur with statements expressing such democratic principles as freedom of speech, equal rights for all, and free elections (Schulz et al. 2010). To date, hardly any research has been conducted about the question whether adolescents vary in their preferences for a certain model of democracy. One study among Canadian children documented a preference for a representative democracy, consensual democracy, or direct democracy as opposed to a meritocracy or oligarchy (Helwig 1998).

Studies indicate that democratic views among adolescents are not equally distributed. With regard to educational track, students in college-bound tracks are often more positively oriented towards democracy, possess more comprehension of democracy, and have a better understanding of democratic institutions (such as parliament, constitution, and presidency) than those in vocational tracks (Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012; Flanagan et al. 2005; Schulz et al. 2010). It is therefore relevant to take educational track and the related differences in social-economic and social-cultural background (OECD 2014) into account when studying adolescents' views on democratic decision-making.

To be able to gain insight into the adolescents' preferences regarding decision-making in situations that are familiar to them, some research has focused on everyday situations, such as the classroom and with friends. These studies showed that even children at the age of six approve of majoritarian decisions in classroom and with friends. However, studies in different cultural contexts have shown that, with age, children become more hesitant to approve majority decisions when these concern personal matters, individual rights, or repeated decisions with a fixed majority and minority (Kinoshita 1989, 2006; Mann et al. 1984; Moessinger 1981). These studies further showed early adolescents (age 10–12 years) to have started to develop a sensitivity to tensions and dilemmas that are central to democratic decision-making. Yet, the participants in these studies were not presented with several decision-making procedures, for example, majority rule, negotiating agreement, or deliberation. More generally, scholars have concentrated on the elements of one type of democracy, namely, a majoritarian democracy. In a study of

6- to 11-year-old Canadian children (Helwig and Kim 1999) and a study of 13- to 16-year-old Chinese adolescents (Helwig et al. 2003), however, the participants were explicitly asked about which type of decision-making process they would prefer: consensual, majoritarian, or authority based. Most Canadian children stated that majority decision-making with peers and family and at school for field trips is a legitimate way, but most of them preferred consensual decision-making. The majority of the Chinese adolescents preferred majority decision-making. The participants in these studies had predominantly a higher social class background and none of these studies have thus been able to explore differences between different social groups.

In the present study, we follow this line of research by focusing on decision-making in adolescents' daily lives. A focus on issues that are familiar to adolescents is important for two reasons. First, research shows that adolescents can learn about democratic processes at school, with friends, and via leisure activities. In these situations adolescents can experience discussions and collective decision-making (Geijsel et al. 2012; Miklikowska and Hurme 2011; Sapiro 2004; Nieuwelink et al. 2016). It has also been found that when young people are asked to make judgements about political democracy, they indeed draw upon their knowledge of aspects of democracy, such as decision-making, in day-to-day activities and their experiences with the outcomes of these (Flanagan 2013; Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht 2003; Greenstein 1965; Helwig and Turiel 2002; Hess and Torney 1967). Adolescents compare between what they experience and judge as fair in their direct environment to situations, institutions, and actors within political democracy, which we call the 'analogy claim'.

A second reason for studying issues of daily significance comes from the finding that although people may refine their democratic views during their lives, the attitudes of adolescents towards salient features of their lives tend to have a lasting impact on these views and political behaviour (Jennings 2007; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009; Sears and Levy 2003). Recent studies have shown that adolescents' attitudes with regard to democracy remain relatively stable between the age of fourteen and early adulthood. A strong correlation has been shown to exist between adolescents' attitudes towards political engagement and political trust (Hooghe and Wilkenfeld 2008; Prior 2010). For this reason, it can be assumed that just how young people perceive daily power-related issues and processes as fair or unfair will influence their attitudes and views on political democracy later in life, which we call the 'permanence claim'.

On the basis of both the analogy claim and the permanence claim, it can be argued that insight into democratic processes in everyday life can deepen our understanding of what democracy means for adolescents and shed more light on the democratic experiences during adolescence as constitutive elements for democratic attitudes in adulthood.

In the present study, we build upon the general picture that emerges from prior research showing that young people have a preference for democratic decision-making in different social contexts. However, it remains unclear what specific views adolescents have regarding issues where collective decision-making is at stake, including the tensions between the various democratic principles involved. Studying adolescents' views in a qualitative way, we aim to gain a situated understanding of adolescents' democratic views by focusing on the different meanings of democratic decision-making in both everyday situations and in the context of political democracy. In sum, we sought to answer the following research question:

Which types of decision-making do adolescents from different educational tracks prefer in everyday situations in comparison with their views on decision-making in political democracy and their interpretation of the concept of democracy?

Methodology

Participants

Adolescents in their second year of secondary education in the Netherlands, aged 13–15 years, participated in our study ($N = 40$). With the selection of the participants, a well-balanced dispersion was strived for with regard to gender, socio-economic milieu, ethnic background, and religious orientation. The 20 boys and 20 girls were also equally distributed between pre-vocational (PV) and pre-academic (PA) education tracks, with 13 adolescents from an ethnic minority. The students attended one of the four following schools in the Netherlands: an orthodox Protestant school that provides both PV and PA education for a homogenous population of non-minority students in the northeast of the Netherlands; a public school that provides only PV education for a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students in the middle of the country; a public school that provides only PA education for a mixed population of students in Amsterdam; and a Catholic school that provides both PV and PA education for a predominantly non-migrant population in the northwest of the country.[1] The adolescents' teacher asked them whether they wanted to participate on a voluntary basis. Their parents were informed about the interview and were told that they could object to their child's participation (no parents objected).

Interview and procedure

We developed a framework of themes and topics from our theoretical perspective to guide the semi-structured interviews (see Creswell and Plano Clark 2008). The interviews were conducted by the first author in the spring of 2011. They lasted approximately 90 minutes and involved the answering of a few introductory questions followed by the presentation of two cases about issues of democratic decision-making. The first case dealt with a hypothetical, but familiar, situation in the classroom (Authors et al., in press) in which the interviewees were asked how they would deal with disagreement among students on the rescheduling of a class. During the case discussion that followed, the interviewees were asked to explain their views in more detail and whether they would change their preferences whenever the situation in the case would be different (e.g. 'Does it matter how many students object to rescheduling the class?', 'Does it matter what kind of argument is being used?'). Near the end of the case discussion, the interviewees were asked to sum up their views and whether there were aspects of decision-making that they found most important. We chose to present a classroom-based situation that adolescents often encounter in daily school life in order to make comparisons between the respondents' views. This case builds upon the research of Helwig and colleagues showing that substantial groups of respondents follow significantly different decision-making strategies within a classroom context (e.g. Helwig and Kim 1999). The case discussion was intended to provide an understanding of how interviewees deal with decision-making and investigate

whether changing circumstances have impact on their preferences. Before and during this case discussion, the interviewer deliberately did not refer to concepts such as 'politics' or 'democracy', so not to influence the interviewees.

In the second case, the students were asked to select a group they objected to from a list including 'atheists', 'religious fundamentalists', 'nationalists', and animal rights activists and then give their views on whether or not that group should – if it were to constitute a majority group – be allowed to abolish the freedom rights of other groups. This case draws upon research showing that people make different judgements when it comes to abstract versus concrete situations (Finkel, Sigelman, and Humphries 1999; Helwig and Turiel 2002). This case discussion was meant to provide insight into the adolescents' views with regard to the boundaries of collective decision-making.

The interviewer next asked the adolescents explicitly about the meaning of 'democracy' and their evaluation of it. The concept was purposefully not mentioned by the interviewer earlier in the interview in order to allow the students to give their own interpretation of democracy and decision-making.

Finally, the interviewees were asked to respond to 14 statements. Two statements gave them an opportunity to sum up their views with regard to decision-making and explicitly formulate these ('When taking a decision it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time', 'When taking a decision it is important that the majority decides'). With other statements we tried to gain insight into the adolescents' perspectives with regard to political democracy (e.g. 'Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives', 'Politicians are mostly concerned with their own interests'). This enabled us to compare their views on everyday situations to their perspective on political democracy, which has not been done before. Together, the four phases of the interview shed light on how adolescents' views differ between everyday situations and political democracy.

Before the interviews took place, a pilot study was conducted with six adolescents from four schools. After three pilot interviews, the interview questions and responses were discussed in the research group and a number of adjustments were made to the set of questions. The adjusted interview questions were then used in the other three pilot interviews.

Coding and analysis of the data

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti, the interviews were coded and analysed on the basis of the concepts that were derived from the theoretical framework and research question (cf. Miles and Huberman 1994). The transcribed interviews were coded using the following categories and subcategories:

- decision-making: majoritarian decision-making, consensual decision-making, deliberative decision-making, changing viewpoint according to size of minority, changing viewpoint because of minority's argument;
- meaning of democracy: decision-making procedure, liberty, equality, and other subcategories;
- evaluation of democracy: positive towards democracy, neutral towards democracy, negative towards democracy, no opinion;
- situation: everyday situations, political democracy.

To determine the reliability of the coding, an independent judge coded the fragments of the transcribed interviews for comparison with the original coding. Cohen's kappa reliability coefficient was then calculated. The category 'decision-making resulted in a Kappa of 0.92, 'meaning of democracy' in a Kappa of 0.85, and 'evaluation of democracy' in a Kappa of 0.83. These reliability values fall into the category 'almost perfect' (0.8–1.0) (Landis and Koch 1977).

The individual respondents were the units of analysis. Many interviewees emphasized several principles when arguing about decision-making. As described above, this is in line with theoretical conceptualizations of decision-making because the models take into account several competing principles, such as majority rule, minority interests, and finding consensus. We categorized the views of the individual respondents by looking at the principles on which they primarily focused. They were classified as referring to 'majoritarian decision-making' when the interviewee argued that it was most important that the majority decides, as referring to 'consensual decision-making' when negotiations to find an agreement was argued by the interviewee to be most important, and as referring to 'deliberative decision-making' whenever the dominant preference of the interviewee was that a rational dialogue between all participants should lead to an agreement about what is publicly seen as the most preferable outcome. Some interviewees mentioned several methods for coming to a decision. Their views were categorized by one preferential model based on their explicit choice between the different ways of coming to a decision near the end of the first case discussion and in the final part of the interview (see above).

Results

In general, the 40 adolescents preferred decision-making procedures where the interests of the whole group were the starting point. Most of the time, they explained what would for the whole group be a fair mechanism to come to a decision. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees (5) had trouble going beyond their own personal interests.[2] When asked about their preferred decision-making strategy, for example, one girl (PV) responded as follows: 'It depends [on what I want] … I am more focused on my own best interests'. When it proved not possible to have things as she wanted them, she then argued that a majority decision was most preferable. When probed for further information, the interviewees formulated views that were all in line with a democratic manner of decision-making and none of them thus argued for deciding based on expertise, or strong leadership. We therefore consider the views of the interviewees regarding decision-making in everyday situations to all be democratic. In Table 1, an overview can be found of the classification of the adolescents' decision-making views, in the setting of everyday life, with respect to specific models of democracy.

Majoritarian decision-making

Those adolescents whose decision-making views matched the majoritarian model of democracy (26) considered the voicing of all perspectives during the decision-making process important. That was the case among adolescents in both PA and PV education. As one girl explained (PV): 'I would want to know whether they have good arguments,

Table 1. Classification of adolescents' views on decision-making and core arguments provided by them.

	Majoritarian: little or no room for minority viewpoints	Majoritarian: room for minority viewpoints	Consensual	Deliberative
Number of respondents ($N = 40$)	13	13	9	5
Role of majority	Majority is always right. That is democratic.	First discuss to see what all viewpoints are. Then vote.	Voting is unfair because then we have to compete with each other. Everybody should be able to take part.	We should be able to find the best solution together. We have to look at all the arguments. It is not about majorities.
Role of minority	Majority decides; tough luck for the others.	If they are fair-sized, you should listen to them to a greater extent.	If it is very important for them, they should be able to have it their way.	It is about the persuasiveness of arguments. Minority or majority status does not matter.

and I would give my point of view … . After that, the majority decides. Tough luck for those who don't get what they want'. This interviewee thus considered it important that everyone be permitted to voice their opinion before the casting of votes.

Among those adolescents whose decision-making views were compatible with a majoritarian model of democracy (26), two types of arguing could be distinguished: one (13) where regarding decision-making in the classroom emphasis was solely on majority interest; the other (13) took in such situations also minority interests into account.

The adolescents in whose views there was a strict focus on majority rule not only argued that majority deciding is fairer, but also argued that the majority is always right. As one boy (PA) stated: 'You have to see it this way: If the majority votes for something, it must be right because that is what most people want'. Some of these adolescents further claimed that this principle should apply to *all* situations. When confronted with the second case involving religious fundamentalists or atheists wanting to abolish rights of minorities, 3 out of the 40 interviewees stated that a majority has the right to do this. As one girl (PA) said: 'It is very unjust … but, yes, they can. It is a majority … . You can't say that in this instance democracy doesn't hold. Democracy always comes first'. This girl further claimed that for decision-making and democracy – a connection that she made herself, it is always best that the majority decide, even when it is a bare majority. For her and some of the other adolescents, minority rights are secondary to majority decision-making.

In contrast, the other adolescents with views that are related to majoritarian model stated that minority viewpoints should also be taken into consideration within the classroom context, especially when it was a substantial group or when they had important objections. In these cases, these adolescents thought that the majority cannot make a decision without considering the consequences for others. As stated by one girl (PV): 'Then they would probably listen to them to a larger extent … . There would be more discussion. Perhaps someone switches sides'. After such discussion, the vote decides how things will go.

Some of the adolescents who also focused on minorities further observed that the arguments people put forward should have implications for the decision-making process. When a minority puts forth weighty arguments, these need to be taken seriously. As one of them (PA) pointed out, the majority may then concur with the minority at times:

'If their reasons are good, then it is fair not to do it … [and] I think the majority will go along with them'. A vote is then not necessary, because – in the opinion of this student – the majority would not object to the clearly legitimate arguments of the minority.

Consensual decision-making

For other interviewees (nine), trying to find a compromise should be the dominant guiding principle to reach a decision. Somewhat more boys and adolescents in the PV track had views related to this model. They argued that all participants must to be allowed to present their viewpoints before trying to reach an agreement. In the subsequent decision-making process, the interests of all participants must then be taken into account to the greatest extent possible. As one girl (PA) expressed it: 'Everyone gives his opinion and then they have to agree with one another. It cannot be the case that, after the discussion, a decision is suddenly made by one group'. For these adolescents, a majority decision is not necessarily a fair decision.

The students whose views matched the consensual model indicated that although it can be time-consuming and hard to find agreement, it is necessary to do so when important arguments are at stake. One girl (PV) goes a step further and claimed that voting in such a situation is not a good method and may even be counterproductive: 'Then they are going to start a dispute while they should be consulting with one another so that they can come to an agreement'. According to a boy (PV), if they cannot find agreement and the minority interests are seen as relevant, the minority should have their way 'because the viewpoint [of the majority] would be at the expense of the others'. Under these conditions, thus, participants' interests are more important than the number of people agreeing or disagreeing. These adolescents nevertheless found it difficult to indicate when interests of participants are of such importance that it should not be overlooked.

Deliberative decision-making

The interviewees (five) who had the strongest preference for deliberative decision-making noted that the process should focus solely on the arguments being made and not the number of people favouring a particular option. This was the case among most adolescents in PA track and only among the girls. The participants in the discussion must first examine the options and arguments put forward during a discussion and then decide on the best option collectively. As one interviewee explained (PA): 'If you are with more people, you are not necessarily right. It is about the best arguments … . You have to convince one another'. The participants in a decision-making process must convince each other. 'Someone may think that he is right. But I can think that he is not right. I cannot decide what is good or bad … it is my opinion. [You reach a decision] by convincing one another' (PA). Everyone has to be open to the ideas of others:

> I think it is important that you are willing to be convinced by others. You have to listen [and ask]: 'Why do you think that? Do I agree? Does this outweigh other arguments? Maybe it is much better, maybe not.' You can change your own ideas. (PA)

Via such discussions, these interviewees think that it is possible to find the best decision.

For these interviewees, it was difficult to determine what should be done when agreement cannot be found. Two of them thought that eventually a majority decision should be taken in such a situation. If the minority has tried to convince the others of an option but failed to do so, then ' … tough luck. Then the majority decides' (PA). The other three interviewees with views related to deliberation disagreed and thought it unfair to let the majority decide – particularly when major interests were at stake. 'Then you know at the start that the others will win, because their group is bigger … If it is really important for the three students, it would really be shitty for them' (PA). Even a small minority should be able to veto an option in the decision-making process. These interviewees further argued that rational considerations must be pivotal in the decision-making procedure. They mentioned two ways to come to a decision. One interviewee (PV) stated that the arguments should be anonymized so that people do not know who came up with them. 'You can write down the arguments anonymously and then decide together'. Another interviewee (PA) asserted that, when prior agreement has not been possible, a person who has not been involved in the decision-making process should examine relevant arguments to reach a decision. Everyone has to be open minded: 'That will be tough … But they just have to be objective. That is important'. The interviewees who emphasized deliberation clearly have high hopes for the rational capabilities of people and think that people are capable of putting their own interests and preferences aside.

Decision-making in classroom and political democracy

The views of the adolescents summarized above refer primarily to the classroom situation and therefore do not automatically apply to the political democracy. Switching the focus to this domain appeared to be difficult for many of the interviewees because they did not have much knowledge of institutions of political democracy. A large subset of the 40 interviewees (18) was unable to explain how they thought the decision-making in parliament should take place or comment on the similarities or dissimilarities with decision-making processes in the classroom. This was predominantly the case among students in PV education, since 14 out of these 18 interviewees are in this educational track.

Most of the interviewees who were able to discuss decision-making in political democracy (18 out of the 22) asserted that the same considerations should hold for the classroom and for parliament. One interviewee (PA), for example, explained: 'Those three children should not have it their way … . Yeah, because that is also what takes place in politics, right? Whenever most people vote for one party, it gets more seats in parliament'. Only 4 of these 22 adolescents argued that the decision-making processes might vary across the two situations, although they did not agree on the ways in which the decision process might diverge. Three of these four students thought that minority interests should to be taken more into account in the classroom situation than in the political democracy. As one boy (PA) explained: 'In the class, decisions aren't that important, so you can make a quick decision. But when it is really important, as with politics, you have to take time to make the decision and find agreement'. One interviewee suggested just the opposite when she (PA) explained:

> [In the classroom] I would let those three students have it their way … But, I want to put forward that if this would be the case within the government with big issues, the minority would not have its way. I would definitely look at what the majority wants.

In sum, for some of the interviewees, their decision-making views in the context of everyday situation and political democracy corresponded; for others, they did not. While all of the interviewees' views greatly resembled one or the other model of democracy, moreover, they nevertheless differed for some of the interviewees depending on the context being considered.

Democrats with limited comprehension of democracy

The aforementioned results show all of the adolescents in our study to be advocates of democratic decision-making. But what about their views on the concept of democracy? What does 'democracy' mean to them? Of the 40 interviewees, 11 did not have a relevant image of democracy. Some of them simply stated that they do not know what 'democracy' means. Others provided an incorrect description: 'That not everyone is equal … I think it sounds angry, somehow. Just like discrimination' (PV). For this aspect we did find differences among PA and PV students because 8 out of the 11 who could not formulate a relevant description of democracy were from the PV educational track.

The interviewees who were able to state what democracy meant most often did that by referring to freedom of speech and/or the right to decide collectively on public policy. One boy (PV) stated for example: '[Democracy] is about the fact that everyone can choose who is in power and that you can decide together what is going to happen to the country'. Most of the interviewees were not able to give a more comprehensive description of the meaning of democracy. When talking about democracy, they did not refer to such things as complex decision-making procedures, a system of representation, or the role of minorities. There was also little awareness of the inevitability of tensions between democratic principles such as majority will versus minority interest or the power of numbers versus the power of arguments.

From a theoretical perspective, decision-making preferences of the adolescents can be expected to relate to their comprehension of democracy. Several interviewees spontaneously commented on this relationship while it was possible to discern a relationship in the responses of some of the other interviewees. The most straightforward relationship between the participants' views on decision-making and definition of democracy was found for the adolescents with a preference for majority decision-making. To them, democracy equalled majority decision-making. As formulated by one boy (PA): 'I think that the majority will have its way. That is the way a democracy functions'. However, many of the adolescents with a preference for either consensual or deliberative decision-making also defined democracy in terms of voting and majoritarian decision-making – even those who strongly rejected to such a decision-making procedure in the classroom.

As has been described above, research (Sigel and Hoskins 1981) showed that adolescents with a more comprehensive understanding of democracy more often make choices that are democratic as opposed to self-centred ones. One indication of such an understanding of democracy in our own research was when the interviewees

spontaneously referred to the concept of democracy without being prompted. These adolescents clearly recognized that aspects of democracy were being addressed upon in the current discussion. These same adolescents might also, therefore, be expected to be more sensitive to the tensions between various democratic principles. Sixteen interviewees referred to democracy before the concept was mentioned by the interviewer. Of these sixteen interviewees, eight emphasized majority decision-making with little or no attention to minority interests despite such adolescents constituting only a small part of the group of interviewees (13 out of the 40, see Table 1). This is an indication that having more understanding of the abstract concept of democracy does not necessarily mean that someone is more sensitive to tensions between democratic principles in a decision-making process.

Conclusion and discussion

In the present study, we aimed to offer a more situated insight into adolescents' views on democratic decision-making than emerges from prior research. We did so by looking at the ways in which adolescents formulate their own preferences regarding decision-making in everyday life, how these can be compared to their views on democracy and decision-making in parliament, and whether or not these differences vary between students from different educational tracks. The different meanings of decision-making in both everyday life situations and political democracy were made visible by using different models of democracy (majoritarian, consensual, and deliberative) and their encompassing potentially conflicting principles. The results showed that adolescents' views on democratic decision-making in everyday situations were often rich, multidimensional, and extended throughout the various models. Most interviewees gave priority to the majoritarian model, while a smaller number of interviewees had primary preferences for consensual or deliberative democracy. Regarding everyday situations, some interviewees took several democratic principles into account, while others focused strictly on one of these principles. Regarding decision-making in parliament and the interpretation of the concept of democracy, we found different results than those in everyday situations. A substantial group appeared to be unable to articulate their perspective on either of these and therefore did not show these rich and multidimensional results. Most of the adolescents who could do so stated that the same considerations should hold for decision-making in everyday situations and parliament. Some interviewees formulated a description of democracy that was more or less in line with their views on decision-making in everyday situations, while others formulated a definition that was, at least partly, in contrast to these views. With regard to educational track, only small differences existed in adolescents' views on decision-making in everyday situations; but pre-vocational students had greater difficulty formulating their views regarding decision-making in parliament and a description of democracy compared to students in the higher educational track.

Before discussing these results in the light of previous studies, we point to several limitations of this study. The research was conducted among a small sample of adolescents in the Netherlands. Our qualitative approach enabled us to explore adolescents' views in depth, but required caution when drawing conclusions. Large-scale research is needed to investigate whether the results are present among other groups of youth as well. Furthermore, this study is based on young adolescents being interviewed once, so it remains

unclear how they will develop their views during the later years of their adolescence and early adulthood. Longitudinal studies are needed to investigate individual trajectories regarding the development of democratic views. A final aspect relates to the interview structure, which might have influenced the interviewees' responses. The discussion of the cases may have been a consequence of how the respondents described democracy. We tried to prevent this form of influence by not mentioning concepts like 'politics' and 'democracy' during the first part of the interview. An indication that the interview structure did not strongly influence the respondents' views is that the perceptions of many adolescents on decision-making in everyday life did not relate to either their views on decision-making concerning freedom rights or their concept of democracy.

The present study showed largely democratic, yet different, views present in adolescence regarding decision-making in everyday situations. This result is in line with previous studies (e.g. Helwig and Kim 1999; Helwig et al. 2003), but also yields new insights into adolescents' democratic views. To conclude this article, we would like to discuss five results that do not correspond with earlier findings or instigate further research. First, in previous studies, adolescents were asked to choose between several options (e.g. Helwig et al. 2003). Our study showed that when young people were asked to formulate their own views on decision-making, they did so in accordance with various models of democracy. This further strengthened the claim that adolescents prefer democratic decision-making versus non-democratic.

Second, contrary to earlier presentations of general preferences for decision-making (Mann et al. 1984; Moessinger 1981), the present research shows that adolescents' views differ between various situations and circumstances. Many adolescents adapt their views when the circumstances in the situations discussed are changed. A substantial group of interviewees at some point endorsed majority decisions in the classroom, but altered their views when the number of people objecting to the majority increased or when the objections became more compelling. This shows that many interviewees consider the circumstances when thinking about an issue, as well as show sensitivity to tensions that arise in a particular situation, due to differing democratic principles.

Third, other studies only showed that adolescents preferred democratic methods for decision-making; we were able to explore adolescents' views in greater detail. Not every interviewee appeared to be sensitive to tensions that come with democratic decision-making, such as majority will versus minority interest, or the power of numbers versus the power of arguments. In the interviews with these adolescents, there was little discussion about the risks of tyranny of the majority (cf. Maletz 2002), deadlocks due to of lack of consensus (cf. Andeweg 2000), or the dominance of the more articulated in a deliberative setting (cf. Sanders 1997).

Fourth, we also investigated the relationship between adolescents' views on decision-making in everyday situations and in political democracy, which has not, to our knowledge, been done previously. While many interviewees differentiated between arguments and interests in everyday situations that they regarded as more or less important, most adolescents only stated that a certain type of decision-making should be used in the political domain. Many adolescents, especially those with consensual or deliberative views on decision-making, formulated a description of democracy that did not correspond to or was even in conflict with their views on decision-making in everyday life. This indicates that, in the perspective of many interviewees, decision-making in the classroom and the concept

of democracy are unrelated. These rather limited and one-dimensional views can perhaps be explained by their limited knowledge of and experiences with political democracy. It can be expected that adolescent views will become more complex when they get more in contact with political democracy and develop a more sophisticated understanding of democracy, as Sigel and Hoskins (1981) showed in their study. However, contrary to this expectation, many adolescents in our study who showed more understanding of politics and the concept of democracy did not take more democratic principles into account when arguing about decision-making in everyday situations. A substantial group of those adolescents even formulated views associated with the tyranny of the majority. A better understanding of political democracy thus did not automatically lead to views that took more principles into account.

Finally, previous studies have shown that educational level is related to adolescents' democratic views (Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012; Flanagan et al. 2005; Schulz et al. 2010). The findings of our study partly contradict this finding. While we have found differences with regard to their ability to formulate views about decision-making in parliament and to give a description of democracy, we have only found minor differences regarding their preferences for democratic decision-making. That these young people in the pre-vocational tracks are less exposed to information and discussions about political democracy does not seem to influence their willingness to make decisions in a democratic manner. Future research should investigate how students from different educational tracks develop their democratic views over time and how differences in views on everyday situations and political democracy develop.

Notes

1. In the Netherlands, both private (primarily denominational) and public schools are state-funded.
2. For reasons of transparency, we will note the numbers of adolescents who formulated a certain perspective between brackets in the presentation of our research results.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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