

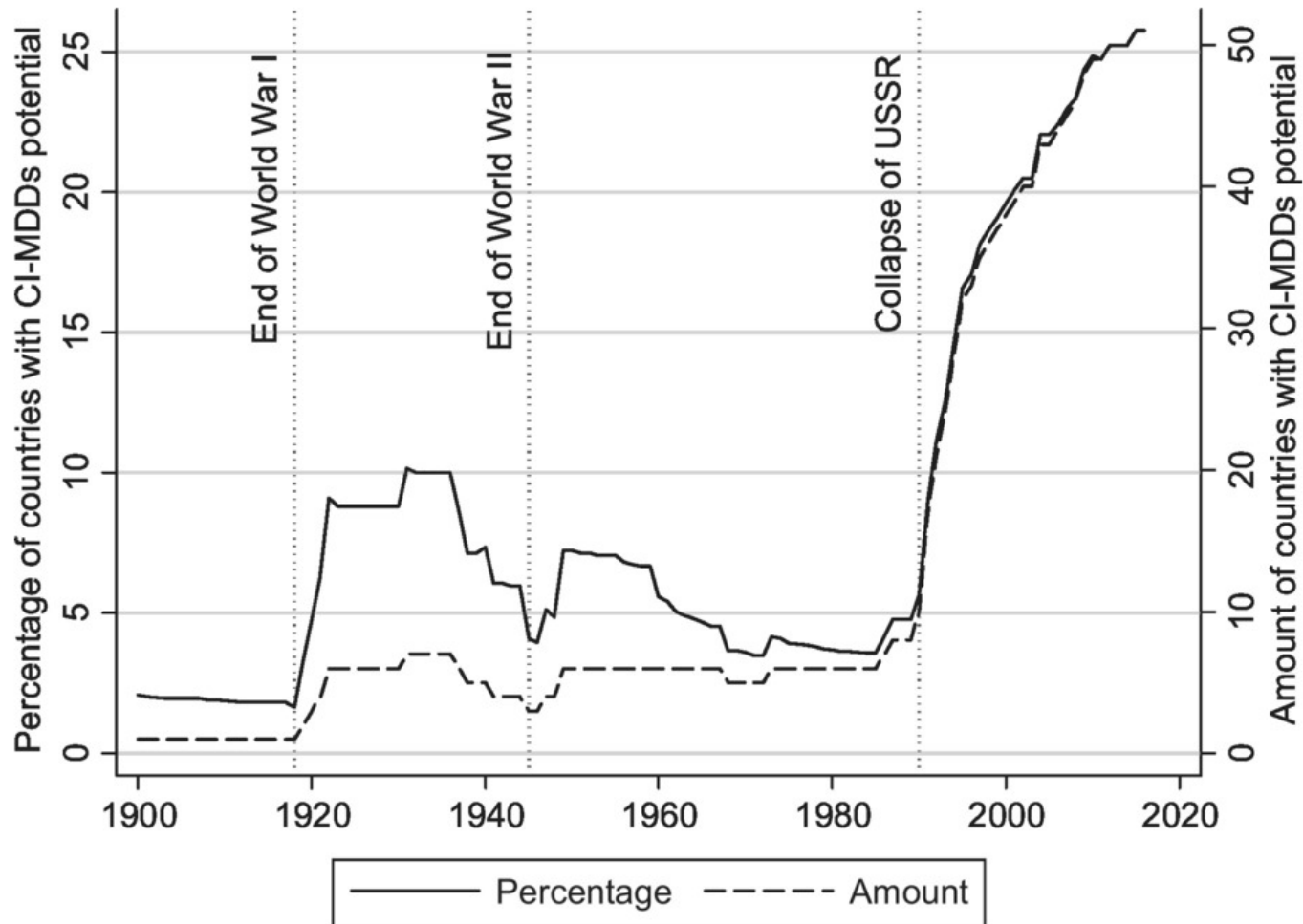
# **Citizens' initiatives in Europe: Trust in the people's judgement and trust in institutions**

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Aarauer Demokratietage, 12 March 2026

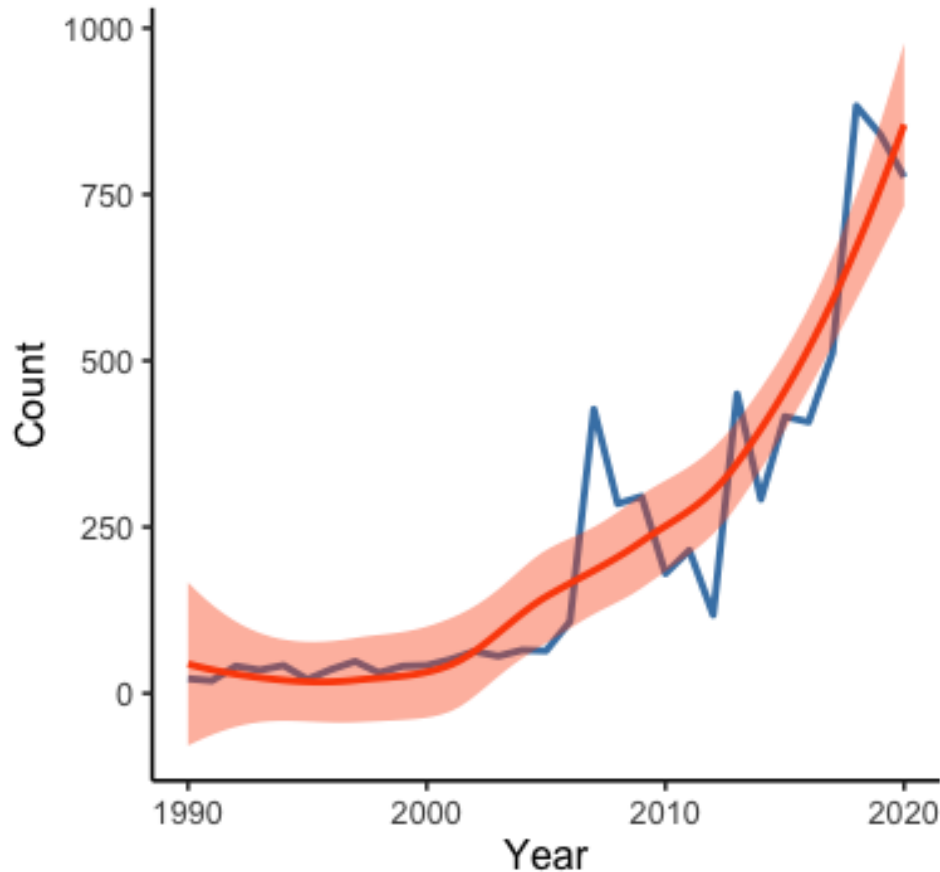
# The rise of bottom-up direct democracy (1/2)



Countries in the world with citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy (CI-MDDs)

D. Altman, *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy* (CUP, 2019) p. 62

# The rise of bottom-up direct democracy (2/2)



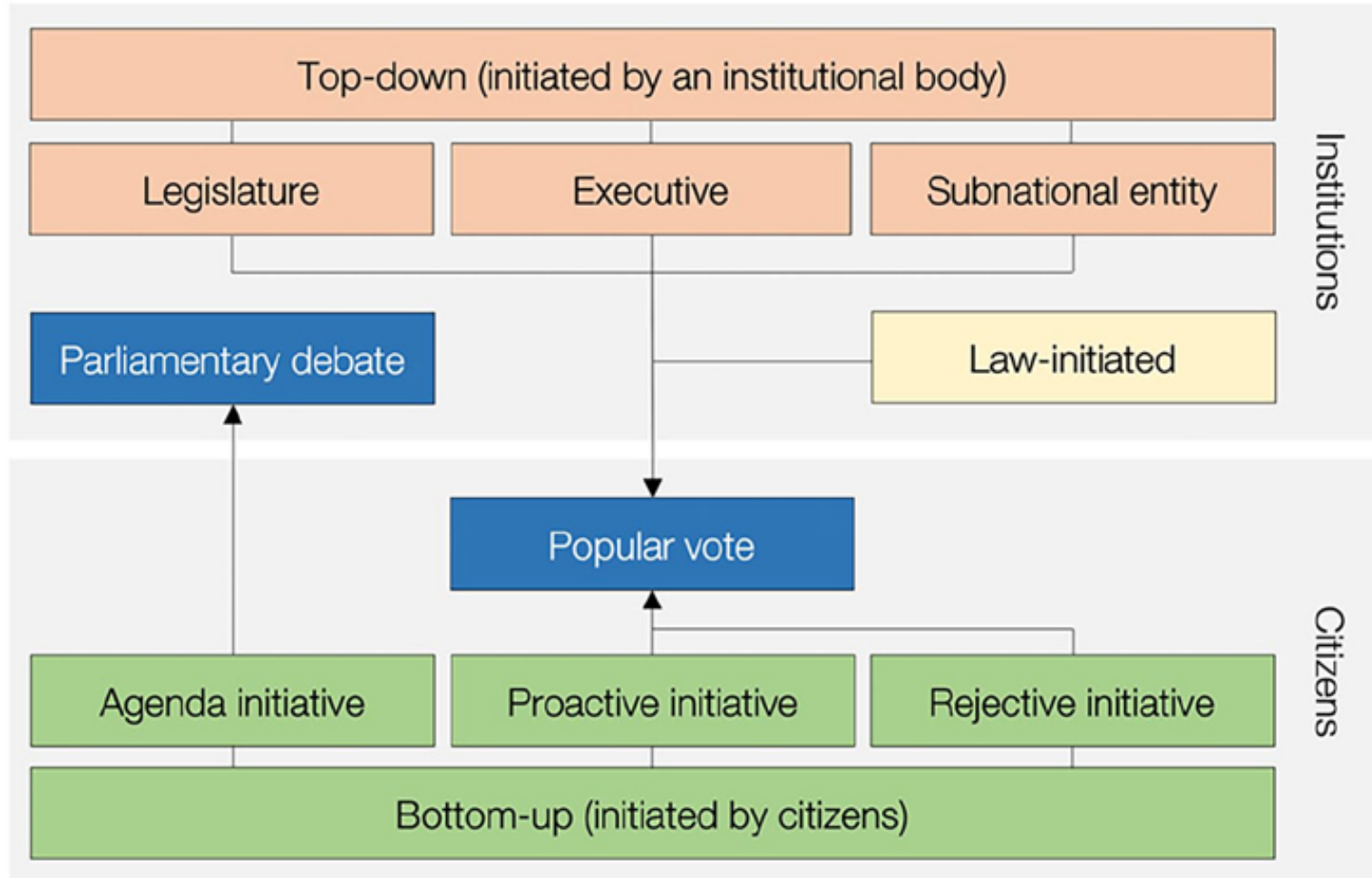
Citizens' initiatives launched per year across European countries

D. Moeckli et al, 'Mapping the European Landscape of Citizens' Initiatives', *Political Studies* (2025)

# Direct democracy and political trust

- Declining trust in representative institutions is an important driver of demands for more direct forms of decision-making
  - E. Ouattara & T. Van Der Meer, 'Distrusting democrats: A panel study into the effects of structurally low and declining political trust on citizens' support for democratic reform', *European Journal of Political Research* (2026)
  - A. Schuck, & C. Vreese, 'Public support for referendums in Europe: A cross-national comparison in 21 countries', *Electoral Studies* 38 (2015), 149
- Availability of (bottom-up) instruments of direct democracy may foster trust in political institutions
  - F. Kuhn & B. Torgler, 'Empowering the Principal: How Direct Democracy Shapes Trust in Institutions', *BITA Working Paper No. 14* (2024)
  - P. Bauer & M. Fatke, 'Direct Democracy and Political Trust: Enhancing Trust, Initiating Distrust – Or Both?', *Swiss Political Science Review* 20 (2014), 49

# Typology of direct-democratic instruments



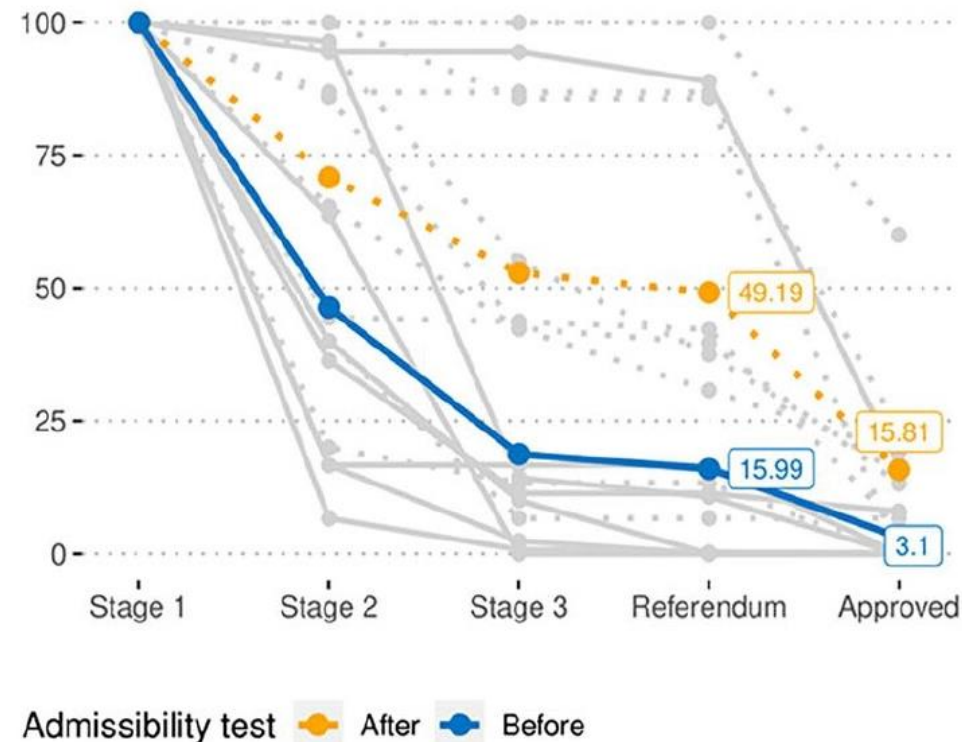
# Impact of citizens' initiatives

TABLE 4.2 Success rates (SR) of MDDs by agenda-setters and policy preferences (1980–2016)

	Policy Preference		
	Status Quo	Change	Total
Agenda-Setter Authorities	36 3.16 (SR = 66.66)	667 58.46 (SR = 72.86)	703 61.61 (SR = 72.54)
<b>Citizens</b>	197 17.27 <b>(SR = 35.02)</b>	241 21.12 <b>(SR = 19.50)</b>	438 38.39 <b>(SR = 26.48)</b>
Total	233 20.42 (SR = 39.91)	908 79.58 (SR = 58.70)	1141 100 (SR = 54.86)

Key: Frequency, cell %, Success Rate  
[This table does not include micro-states]

D. Altman, *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy* (2019), p. 96



D. Moeckli et al, 'Mapping the European Landscape of Citizens' Initiatives', *Political Studies* (2025)

60%

Success rate for Hungary

0.15%

# Admissibility requirements for citizens' initiatives

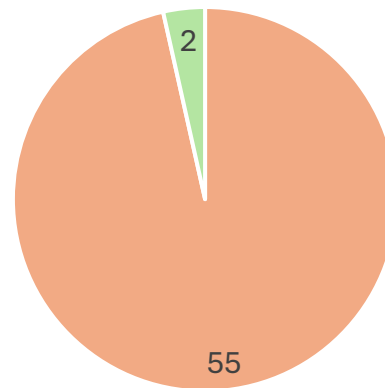
## Formal requirements

- Concern the formulation of the initiative
- Requirements of clarity, unity of substance etc.

## Substantive requirements

- Concern the content of the initiative
- Topic prohibitions

## Bottom-up instruments



■ Admissibility requirements    ■ No admissibility requirements

# Trust in the people's judgment?

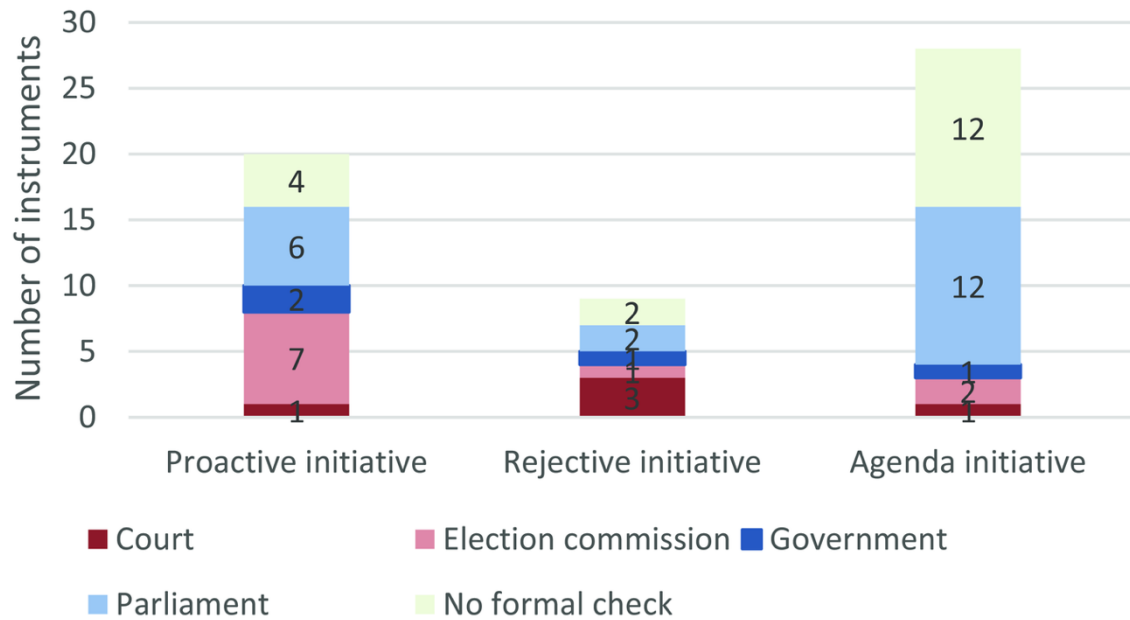


Substantive requirements for bottom-up instruments: Prohibited subject matters

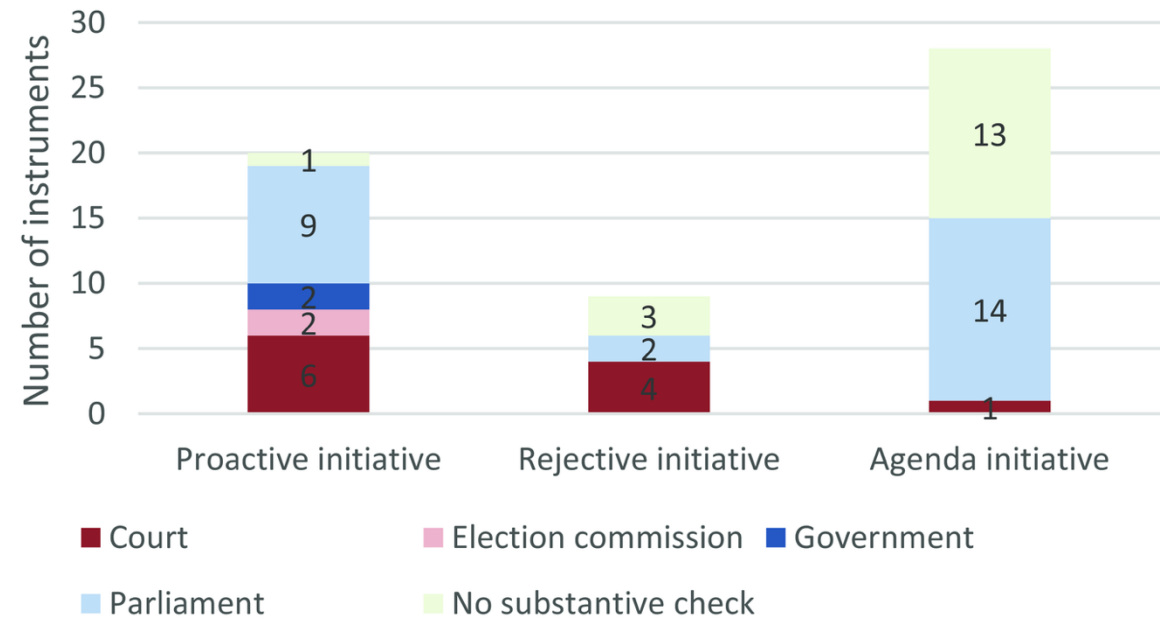
D. Moeckli, 'Beyond the Reach of the People? Admissibility Requirements and Procedures for Citizens' Initiatives in Comparative Perspective', *EuConst* (2025) 230, p. 245

# Trust in institutions?

## Formal admissibility check



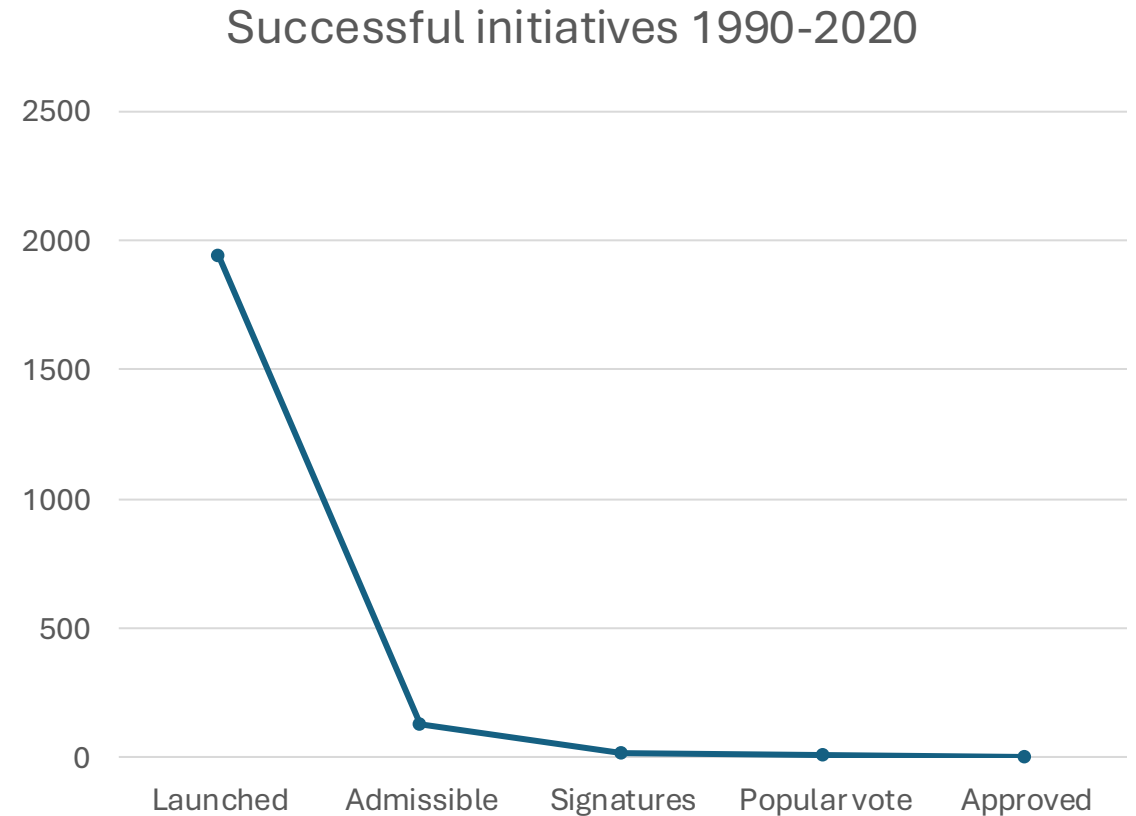
## Substantive admissibility check



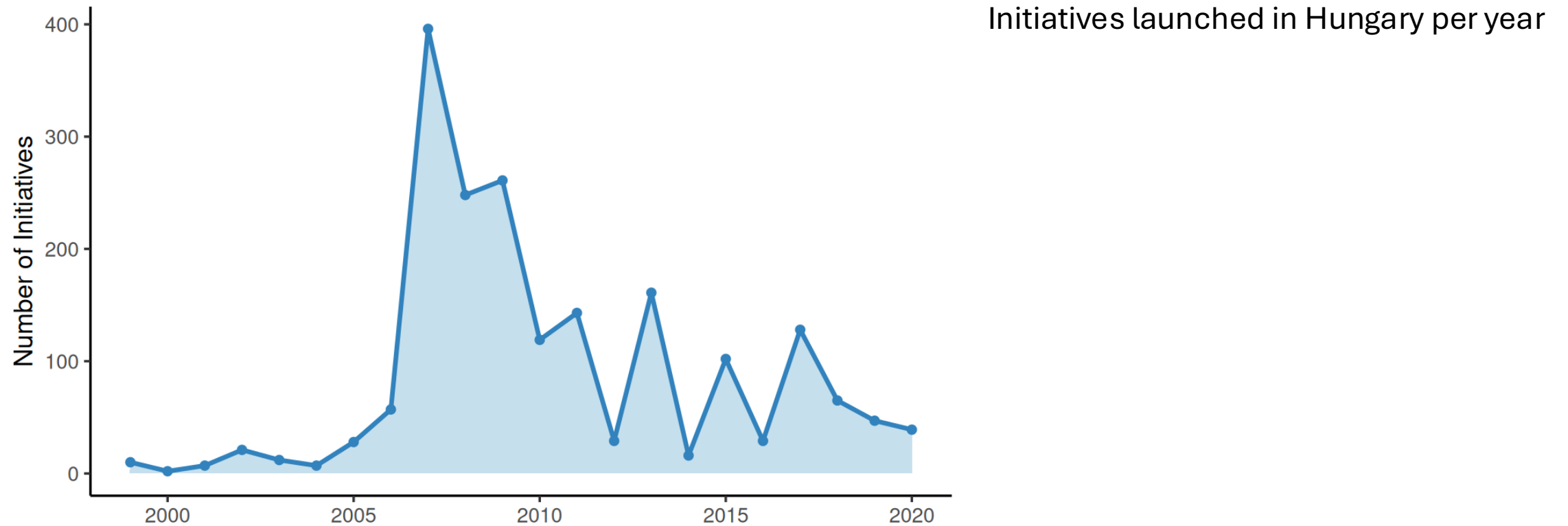
D. Moeckli, 'Beyond the Reach of the People? Admissibility Requirements and Procedures for Citizens' Initiatives in Comparative Perspective', *EuConst* (2025) 230, p. 257

# Trust in institutions? The case of Hungary

- Strict formal and substantive admissibility requirements
- Checked by National Election Commission – Curia – Constitutional Court



# Bottom-up direct democracy relies on trust



# Thank you!



**Our research on direct democracy**



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