

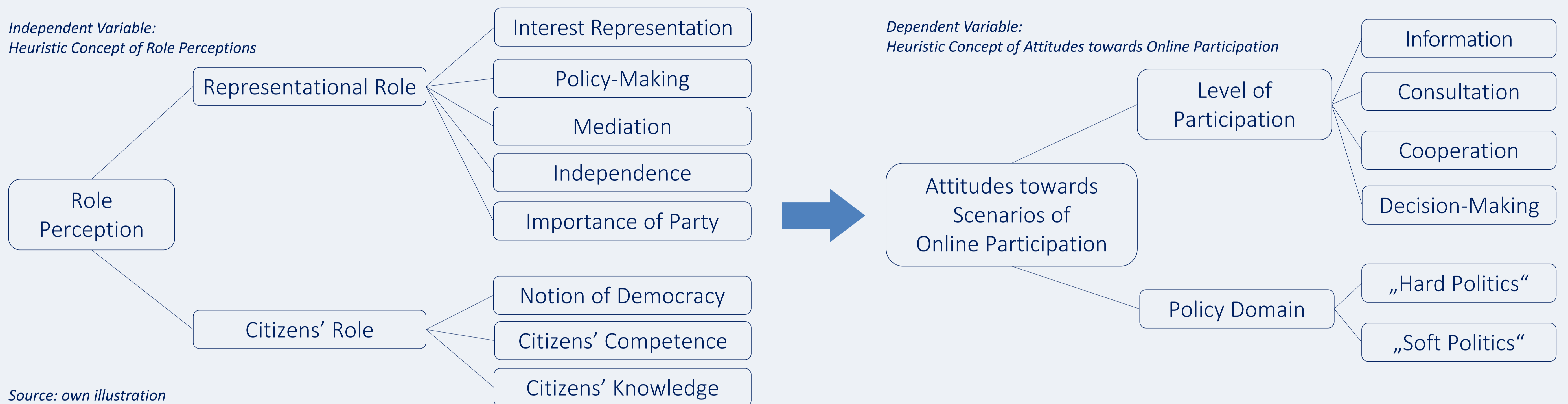
Online Participation from the Perspective of Local Representatives

Nadja Wilker • Political Science • Institute of Social Sciences • HHU

Research Question and Theoretical Approach

- On the local level, councilors play a crucial role as addresses, gatekeepers and representatives of citizens' interests and demands.
- Online participation creates a new framework and new challenges for the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives.
- Online participation includes a range of top-down initiated, ICT-based practices that enable citizens to actively interact with (local) governments in decision-making processes in different policy domains by making use of different levels of participation.

→ **What do representatives think about different scenarios of online participation and how do their role perceptions influence these attitudes?**



Empirical Analyses and Results

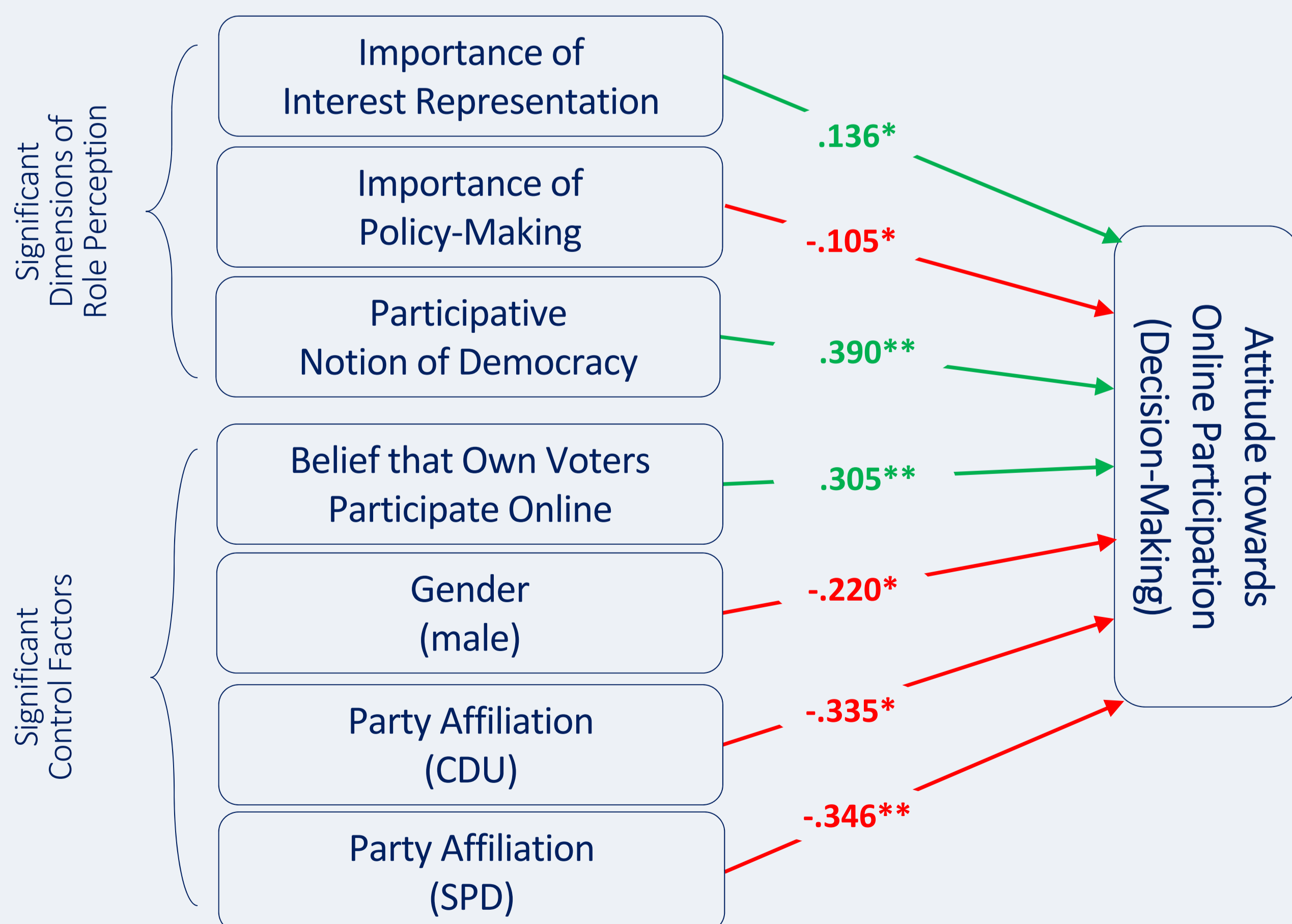
Data Base

- Online survey among local councilors in NRW in Sept/Oct 2016
- Sample: 3.500 councilors from 76 different-sized municipalities
- Adjusted response rate: 32,8% (N = 1.148)

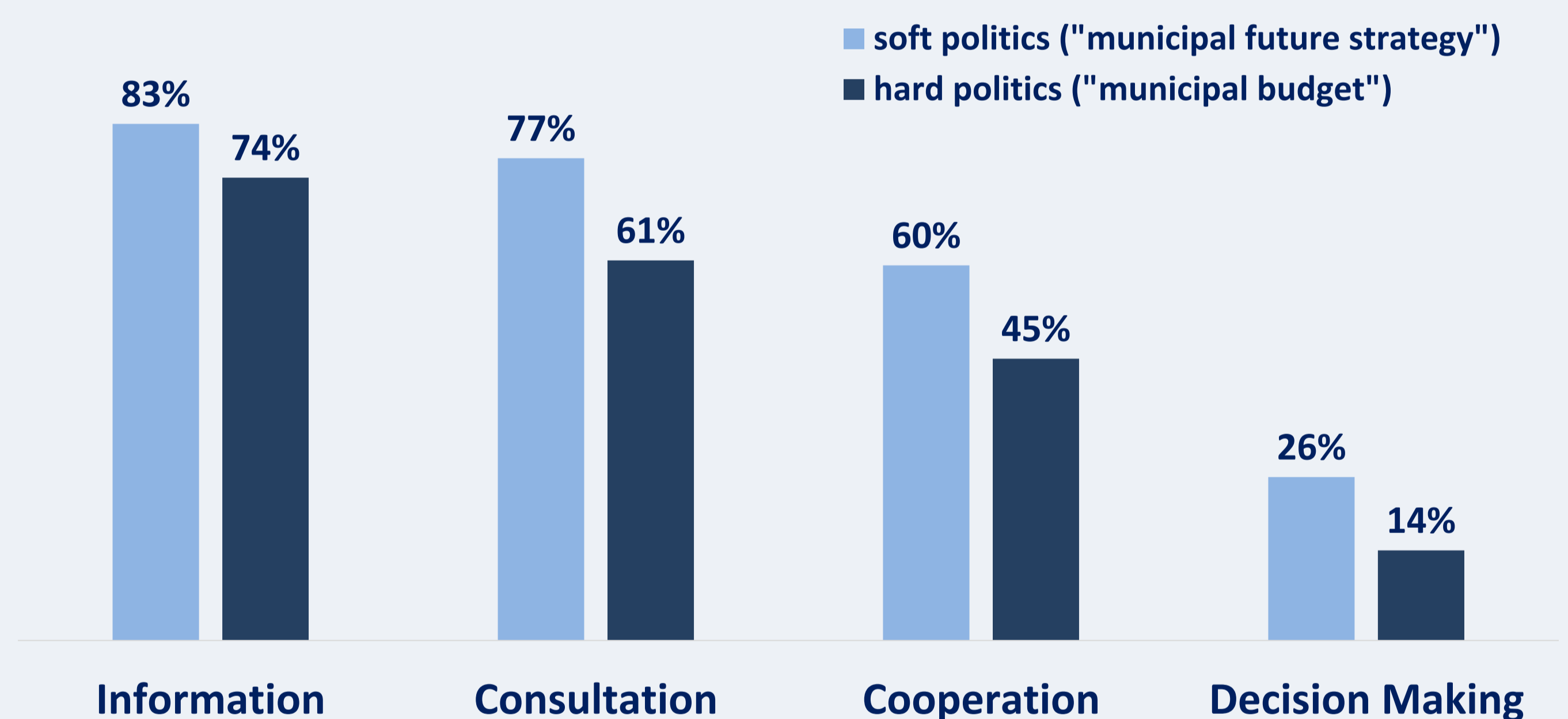
General Findings

- 87% of the councilors have heard about online participation before.
- One half of the councilors agrees that online participation is generally useful.
- Almost half of the councilors think that citizens do not know enough about local politics to really have a say.
- Only 20% of the councilors think that their own voters would participate online.

Explanatory Model for Councilors' Attitudes



Councilors' Attitudes Towards Different Scenarios of Online Participation



Conclusions

- Attitudes of representatives differ between scenarios of online participation: the more their own scope of action is concerned the more skeptical they are.
- Regarding control factors, neither the representatives' age nor their own internet usage provide explanatory power, but gender and party affiliation do for some scenarios.
- Representatives' individual role perceptions partly explain their attitudes towards online participation:
 - Representatives' notion of democracy and their belief that their own voters participate online are the strongest positive explanatory factors for their attitudes towards all scenarios.
 - The more important policy making is for a councilor, the more negative is his attitude towards online participation.
 - Regarding oneself as an independent, ultimate decision-maker does not interfere with a councilor's appreciation of citizen participation.

Supervision Team

- Prof. Dr. Stefan Marschall (Political Science, HHU)
- Prof. Dr. Brigitte Geißel (Political Science, University of Frankfurt)

- Prof. Dr. Michael Baumann (Sociology, HHU)
- Dr. Oliver Märker (zebralog, Agency for Crossmedial Public Participation)