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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Reconfiguring responsibilities between state and market: how the 'concept of the state' affects political consumerism

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Abstract

Citizens hold different views on what they consider to be an appropriate role of the state in society. Their '*concept of the state*' varies, and with it vary the views on which duties and responsibilities belong to the state, firms and citizens, and which role corresponds to each of them in tackling socio-political concerns. Based on a comparison of 20 European countries, this paper shows that such views affect individuals' tendency to become political consumers and the overall extent of political consumerism in a country. Depending on whether cooperative approaches predominate in a society or, in turn, a reliance on free-market mechanisms prevails, the magnitude of political consumerism is larger or smaller in a country, respectively. Furthermore, the same pattern is observable at the individual level: citizens holding a cooperative '*concept of the state*' are twice as likely political consumers than are citizens relying on free-market mechanisms. Thus, the study shows that different '*concepts of the state*' explain cross-national differences in political consumerism, and these differences are immediately connected to singular patterns that underlie the individual inhabitants' attitudes. Moreover, this highlights that attempts to encourage political consumerism should focus on means that are attuned to the prevailing '*concept of the state*'.

Keywords Political attitudes · Varieties of capitalism · Political consumerism · Boycotting · Buycotting · Political participation

Introduction

The last decades have been characterised by a continuous reorganisation of responsibilities and duties between the political and the business spheres (Crouch 2004; Haufler 2001; McGrew 1997; Thompson 1997). Transnationally operating organisations

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and firms have become key actors and additional addressees for political concerns, and more and more individuals appear to recognise their political power vis-à-vis those actors (Bossy 2014; Micheletti 2003; Micheletti and Føllesdal 2007; Neilson 2010; Sassatelli 2008; Spaargaren and Martens 2005).

To address and express their political concerns in this new environment, citizens can and do use a multiplicity of new digital and analogue forms of political participation. Rather than relying on election-centred political participation alone, they resort to a customised inclusion of 'politics' in everyday life (Bennett 2012; Dalton 2006, 2010; Lindén 2005, p. 208; Norris 2011; Papadopoulos 2013; Stolle et al. 2003; van Deth 2012). Nonetheless, while the general developments are relatively similar across countries worldwide, even in similar contexts of economic and democratic conditions, the modes and scopes in which citizens respond to it differs widely (e.g. Gabriel and Völkl 2008; Teorell et al. 2007). What can explain these differences in participation patterns across countries?

A general conclusion from existing studies is that whether and how citizens participate politically is closely linked to their socio-demographic background, political attitudes, and to the (political) institutional environment they live in (Dalton 2013; Verba et al. 1995). A peculiar feature of the currently evolving environment though is that a multiplicity of issues relates to private individual-level interests and to public macro-societal concerns conjointly. Furthermore, these concerns are not expressed solely in the political sphere anymore (Bennett 2012; Dalton 2008a; van Deth 2016; Micheletti 2003; Theocharis and van Deth 2016). Private and civic considerations get mixed and can influence together whether, why, and how one gets politically involved (Bennett 1998).

A political participation form where this blurring of the public and the private is particularly notable is *political consumerism.* Political consumers base their individual purchasing decisions on environmental, ethical and other socio-political considerations. Thus, they tie in private needs and desires with public-political aspirations. However, despite the wider array of influences coming from distinct spheres of live, current approaches to study the drivers of political consumerism focus for the most part on classical political science perspectives, leaving a limited comprehension of what conditions enable political consumerism. This paper seeks to further the understanding of the drivers of political consumerism by looking at the interactive connection that exists between public and private spheres, and between micro- and macro-level developments. Specifically, it addresses the question whether and to what extent political consumerism varies as a function of the understanding that people have of the roles of the state, firms and citizens in tackling political concerns relating to consumption.

Extant research in political science, sociology and social psychology points to recursive relationships between macro-level circumstances and micro-level conduct: When interacting and living together, individuals develop particular views and attitudes concerning the state, the market, civil society and themselves in their roles as citizens. This includes distinct views about the duties and responsibilities attributed to each of those institutions and actors, and about what cooperation between them looks or should look like (Almond and Verba 1996; Kim et al. 2012; North 1990; Pickel and Pickel 2006). These views develop at the individual level, while

simultaneously they constitute the grounds on which common views can emerge in a society (Hofstede 1996; Minkov and Hofstede 2011; Swidler 1986; Zorell 2019).

Similarly, in their theory of the 'Varieties of Capitalism', Hall and Soskice (2001) distinguish distinct styles that predominate across countries in managing interactions between the state and the business sector. Bonding these thoughts, the paper develops the idea of the '*concept of the state*' to tie in two aspects: general *patterns* of attitudes that predominate among a country's inhabitants and influence their political participatory choices; and predominant styles of *approaches* that institutions in a country typically follow in socio-political concerns. The main proposition is that a common pattern—a common concept of the state—can develop in a country, but vary across countries and among single individuals. These variations may explain why some citizens are more likely than others to get involved politically when facing a same concern, and why macro-societal patterns in political consumer engagement vary across countries.

As recent figures suggest, purchasing everyday products based on political considerations has become one of the most popular modes of political participation next to voting (Micheletti 2003; Micheletti et al. 2012; Stolle and Micheletti 2013). In several countries, participation rates reach 60 up to 80%.[1] Yet, in other countries participation levels remain low. Against this backdrop, the research question guiding this paper is, if the 'concept of the state' can explain (differences in) political consumerism, both at the individual and the country levels.

After outlining the theoretical framework and hypotheses, I investigate into the question through the combination of two studies. The first study looks at the connection between the concept of the state and the general extent of political consumerism in a comparative study of 20 European liberal democracies using data from the European Social Survey (2002).[2] This is followed by a study that considers how differences in political consumerism relate back to the individuals' 'concept of the state'. To this end, I draw on data from an original survey conducted in 2014 among 1.350 individuals living in Germany.[3] A final section brings together the findings and discusses their implications, also with a particular view on the wider applicability of the concept of the state to political participation research.

[1] Analyses of the European Social Survey (2014), for example, reveal such a status for boycotting in Germany (35%), Finland (37%), France (36%), Sweden (47%), among others. Buycotting is hardly assessed in large-scale surveys, but usually percentages are notably higher than for boycotting. Therefore, these figures for boycotting are likely to underestimate the real weight of political consumerism on the repertoire of political participation forms.

[2] Very few sources provide data on boycotting *and* buycotting *and* cover multiple countries. The first round of the European Social Survey (ESS) fielded in 2002/03 is the latest of the very few larger scale surveys which include such questions. In addition, it focuses on boycotting and buycotting for political reasons in general rather than sub-aspects like environmentally considerate consumerism, and it covers various (European) countries. Notwithstanding the age of the data, the unique coverage of multiple countries at a same point in time permits obtaining an estimate of the cross-sectional bonds between the variables of interest and thus a first glance at the theory's empirical plausibility.

[3] The survey was conducted in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Baringhorst and Dr. Yang from the University of Siegen, whom I thank for the great cooperation.

Responding to a changing political environment

Increasingly, globalised tasks and operations leave a "regulatory vacuum in global governance" (Scherer and Palazzo 2011, p. 899; Vogel 2008, p. 266; see also Micheletti 2003, p. 9; Stolle and Micheletti 2013, p. 8, ref. to Young 2006, 2010). Here, firms come in and fill the vacuum by taking up political and social responsibilities that formerly belonged to the public sector (Haufler 2001; Heidbrink and Hirsch 2008, 15ff.; Scherer and Palazzo 2011, pp. 900–901; see also Matten and Crane 2005; Scherer and Smid 2000). Conventional democratic systems are challenged, and the views about which actors are responsible for what political issues, and who should be directly held accountable, are changing.

To cope with these shifts, citizens need adequate mechanisms and means in response (cf. Micheletti 2003, pp. 13–15). In this vein, the number of citizens who have participated in petitions or social media campaigns addressing firms with concerns of political nature has been on a rise in recent years (van Deth and Zorell 2019). One particularly much used form constitutes political consumerism.[4] The political consumer is a citizen who, being aware of the political embeddedness of consumption, deliberately decides to buy or not to buy some product for ethical, environmental or societal reasons (Micheletti 2003, p. 19). It is an exemplary mode of 'lifestyle' politics or individualised collective action forms of participation, which individuals flexibly use within their everyday lives to address political matters (Bennett 1998, 2003; Micheletti and Stolle 2010).

Some authors see political consumerism as a specimen of broader, recently developing patterns of participation (e.g. Dalton 2008a, b; Ekman and Amnå 2012; Ohme et al. 2017). Other studies show that, rather than being the extension of existing ones like protest or civic involvement, political consumerism constitutes an independent new mode of participation (Acik 2013; Teorell et al. 2007; Theocharis and van Deth 2016). Independent of which of the two perspectives is assumed, the studies clearly show that it is a phenomenon not only of the wealthy, individualistic and saturated democracies, but of widespread and continuously expanding relevance (Echegaray 2015; Nielsen 2014).

[4] Parts of this paper are based upon ideas developed in the author's dissertation.

Political consumerism involves two principal modes of action:[5] the 'negative' form, that is, boycotting a purchase with the intention to express discontent with particular practices (Jensen 2005); and the 'positive' form, which consists in deliberately buying, i.e. 'buycotting' to approve of a conduct (Boström et al. 2005; Stolle et al. 2003). Similar to political participation generally, boycotter and buycotter as compared to non-political consumers tend to be more highly educated, affluent, postmaterialist, politically interested and ethically concerned (Acik 2013, pp. 9–11; Baek 2010; Copeland 2014; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen 2003; Koos 2012; Micheletti and Stolle 2005; Newman and Bartels 2011, pp. 810–812; Quintelier and van Deth 2014; Stolle et al. 2010; Strømsnes 2005; Tobiasen 2005, p. 132; see for a good overview Stolle and Micheletti 2013). Respectively, the two are typically seen as expression of certain values, norms or preferences of political nature with which the respective products are associated, used mainly by highly educated and affluent citizens (Koos 2012, p. 38; Micheletti et al. 2003; Newman and Bartels 2011; Stolle et al. 2003, 2005). Analogous to the individual-level explanations, cross-national differences in political consumerism have been linked to affluence and postmaterialist value orientations, (high) social capital, religion (protestant), and to generalised trust in co-citizens and institutions (Koos 2012; Micheletti et al. 2012; Stolle et al. 2005; Stolle and Micheletti 2013).

However, several observations suggest that political consumerism grounds on more than only the desire to express certain (ethical) values and affluence (e.g. Neilson 2010). On the one hand, by conceptually distinguishing between boycotting and buycotting, empirical studies reveal that the distribution of citizens who engage in one *or* the other variant differs substantially from country to country (e.g. Copeland 2014; Koos 2012; Neilson 2010; Stolle and Micheletti 2013). On the other hand, the percentage of citizens who engage in boycotting and buycotting varies considerably across countries also in contexts of comparable economic, democratic and societal conditions.

As explanation for such variances, some authors have highlighted the close relationship between political consumerism and the prevalence of institutional arrangements that facilitate political consumerism, namely labelling schemes (Boström and

[5] But see also Micheletti et al. (2012), who distinguish four modes of political consumerism: boycott, buycott, "discursive actions" and "lifestyle choices" (2012, p. 146; see also Micheletti and Stolle 2010; Stolle and Micheletti 2013, p. 27 & 39ff.). Discursive actions they define as "the expression of opinions about corporate policy and practice and even consumer culture in a variety of communicative efforts and venues" (2012, p. 146). Lifestyle choices refer to the individual decision to incorporate responsible action and certain values of political nature consistently in daily life (2012, p. 145; see also Micheletti and Stolle 2010, p. 126; Stolle and Micheletti 2013, pp. 41–42). Hence, the former focuses on how openly an individual propagates an action, the latter to the constancy and actions' bearing on an individual's life. Regardless of whether a person acts in public or private, and whether s/he does it once or frequently, the act per se must consist in either rejecting to buy or deliberately buying a certain product or from a certain firm. At the same time, each of the two modes can involve boy- and buycotting as well as other forms of (political) behaviour. In sum, 'discursive actions' and 'lifestyle choices' embody somewhat variable behavioural repertoires, which can go beyond political consumerist acts and simultaneously involve various political consumer modes at once. More than additional variants of political consumerism next to boy- and buycotting, they may rather be regarded as attributes specifying the depth and breadth of an involvement.

Klintman 2006; Jordan et al. 2003; Stokke et al. 2005; Stolle et al. 2003; Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 111ff. & 135ff.; Tobiasen 2005). People need to know what to buy- or boycott and, like a brand, labels can inform about the background or quality of a product and thus facilitate this distinction. In a related approach, Bair and Palpacuer (2012) analyse to what extent different national institutional settings affected the development of anti-sweatshop politics. They observe distinct shapes and ways of framing the approaches depending on the peculiar national institutional environments and political cultures. Hoffmann (2014) comes to a similar conclusion, linking cross-country variation of boycotting engagement to cultural characteristics.[6] In sum, citizens appear to make their participatory choices dependent on factors that relate to the specific socio-cultural and institutional environment they live in. But how that links to variations in individual political consumer behaviour is yet unclear.

In his study of intercultural differences in how people behave in contexts of human interaction and collaboration, Hofstede identifies national patterns or, as he calls it, a "collective mental programming" (Hofstede 1996, 388) according to which citizens exhibit similar patterns of behaviour and attitudes depending on the country they come from. This mental programming includes, among other things, their 'political culture', which Almond and Verba defined as "the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of a nation" (1963, pp. 14–15). It consists of the individuals' "attitudes toward the political system and its various parts" and their "attitudes toward the role of the self in the system" (Almond and Verba 1963, p. 13). They develop on the individual level, therein being influenced by society specific events and peculiarities. Simultaneously, they constitute the grounds on which specific attitudes in a society as a whole develop (Almond and Verba 1980, pp. 27–28; Eisenstadt 1997, p. 451; Hofstede 1996, p. 388; Reisinger 1995, p. 335). Hence, Almond and Verba delineate a concept that immediately links micro-level conduct with macro-level developments and vice versa. They explicitly focus on culture in its meaning as a "*psychological orientation*" towards socio-political objects and processes (Almond and Verba 1963, 14; emphasis in original). In this vein, they connect individual dispositions with generic patterns, and the dispositions and patterns with institutional processes.

However, their concept relates explicitly to the sphere of politics, policy and the polity (Almond and Verba 1963, pp. 12–13; Ersson and Lane 2008). The peculiar encounter of the newly evolving environment though is that it challenges precisely this clear-cut demarcation of the political from other spheres of life when it comes to define individual behaviour. Citizens witness increasingly globalised production chains, cross-border political challenges, and a blurring boundary between the civic and private selves. Decisions taken as a consumer in Europe, for instance, can sustain or impinge on human rights abuses in Bangladesh and environmental pollution in Brazil. In this context, transnationally operating organisations and firms are key actors and additional addressees for political concerns. From a democratic

[6] Specifically, Hoffmann (2014) points to the distinct preferences of people across countries for either individual or collective action taking. He finds a positive effect of a culture which emphasises 'institutional collectivism' (i.e. collaborative action and resource distribution) on boycotting.

perspective, this requires means to hold firms accountable for their actions. These developments have spurred the use by citizens worldwide of political participation modes targeting these actors outside traditional political arenas (Bennett 1998, 2003, 2012; van Deth 2016; Micheletti 2003; Micheletti et al. 2012; Micheletti and Stolle 2010; Theocharis and van Deth 2016). There, rather than the structures, actors and procedures of the immediate political system, the crucial 'object of orientation' is the relationship between the state and firms, and the way in which duties, competences and responsibilities are shared among those actors.

This state-firm bond is analysed by Hall and Soskice (2001). In their theory of Varieties of Capitalism, they identify concrete patterns according to which actors in single nations typically solve economic- and socio-political challenges (Hall and Soskice 2001, pp. 8 and 13). In the vein of Almond and Verba, they describe a distribution of *patterns of orientations* towards how collaboration is usually tackled among the actors in a country. Institutional structures condition those patterns according to which actors[7] behave. These structures they view in turn as "nation-specific", i.e. shaped by national circumstances like culture, history, etc. (2001, pp. 15–16). This results in singular patterns of macro-level institutional arrangements and micro-level practices within countries, and systematic differences across them. Yet, their theory focuses on firms as actors, not the individual citizens. Tying in the two theories—Political Culture and Varieties of Capitalism—permits to generate a concept which connects the two levels (i.e. individual and country level) and spheres (i.e. public-politics and private-consumer spheres): the '*concept of the state*'.

The concept of the state

Different types of institutional regime, (political) culture and market economy prevail across countries. These, I propose, shape the predominant attitudes in a society concerning the roles of the state, firms and the citizenry in matters of socio- and economic-political relevance. Those attitudes will be labelled *'concept of the state'* as this summarises the ideas on what is considered an appropriate role and position of the state in modern society. The concept of the state, then, bonds various ideas: It refers to citizens' attitudes concerning the state, firms and citizens, and the relationship between them. It denotes the citizens' view about whom of those various actors is responsible for what, what cooperation between them typically looks like, and which role each of them takes on. Furthermore, it relates to the contention that public (political) and private (economic) actors can act based on different understandings of what their roles in society are. Besides, equivalent to Almond and Verba (1963, 1980) the concept ties together country-level patterns and micro-level

[7] In Hall and Soskice's theory, 'actors' refers to companies (Hall and Soskice 2001, 15). The reason for this is that, in their theory, it is companies that are those central interacting actors which find themselves confronted with a coordination problem. Nevertheless, also citizens constitute actors who interact in the framework of specific institutional structures and therein need to coordinate their actions. Correspondingly, the presented ideas may as well serve as point of departure for analysing the behaviour of individuals in the context of coordination problems.

behaviour. Commonly held views build the basis of a "repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action'" (Swidler 1986, p. 273), that is, preferred approaches to solve socio-political tasks (Swidler 1986, pp. 276–277; cf. also Wahlström and Peterson 2005, p. 240). Hence, building on Hofstede's observations, it can be expected that among the members of a community a shared concept of the rules and structures based on which the state, individuals and firms interact and organise can emerge (Minkov and Hofstede 2011; see also Denters et al. 2007). In a context of reshuffling duties and responsibilities between public and commercial actors, this common concept—the concept of the state—would then be expected to guide the establishment of mechanisms that serve to secure political accountability.

Hall and Soskice distinguish two main strategies that predominate across countries (Hall and Soskice 2001, pp. 8 and 16): in so-called 'coordinated market economies', non-market forms of cooperation between the three actors state, market and civil society prevail as means to deal with tasks of socio- and economic-political significance. The strategic approach focuses on consensus finding and the reliance on interfirm networks and sectorial associations. In line with this, corresponding policies centre on enabling non-market coordination and cooperation (Hall and Soskice 2001, pp. 46–47). In contrast, in so-called 'liberal market economies', actors rely on free-market competition as means for coordinating their undertakings. They seek to avoid institutional intervention and, instead, rely on formal contracts to ensure successful collaboration (cf. also Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009, p. 675). At the same time, policies are compatible with the systemic structure when designed such that they "[…] sharpen market competition" (Hall and Soskice 2001, p. 46). Additionally, the authors distinguish a third category of countries that appears to be moving in between the two extremes. A main common characteristic which the countries in this 'mixed' group share is a separation of the private and the public realms. A relatively large state-controlled business sector prevails besides to which informal networks are highly relevant. Hence, actors and structures seem to favour cooperative approaches in corporate relations, and rather liberal approaches in concerns that affect the interaction of firms with other actors in society (Hall and Soskice 2001, p. 21; Hancké et al. 2009, pp. 290–291).[8]

Following this reasoning, different types of concept of the state prevail across countries and shape cooperation in society. These general understandings of preferred behaviour reverberate on the behaviour of the individuals involved in respective interactions. Breaking down the theory to the individual level, it then means that the mode of operation of a country's market economy can shape the inhabitants' attitudes. Correspondingly, the type of balance between the state, firms and citizens which individual citizens are used to can be expected to head in one of two

[8] The authors mainly attribute the structures of the countries in this cluster to their similar historical backgrounds: Broad influence of the state on the economy provided for structures facilitating non-market cooperation. Besides, several of the countries have relatively recently left behind autocratic state structures. This resulted in a large state-controlled business sector and the high relevance of family ties and informal networks (see e.g. Hancké et al. 2009, pp. 290–291).

predominant directions:[9] Citizens who are living in a country with a liberal market economy are used to the general belief that the free-market mechanism leads to the desired alteration in products and/or firm practices. This general belief may both reflect and resonate on individual behaviour. Therefore, they would be expected to rely on market-based mechanisms for solving problems, i.e. to have a *liberal concept of the state*. In contrast, individuals who are living in and formed by a system founded on cooperation and coordination would be expected to rely upon collaboration and shared responsibility. That is, they would have a *cooperative concept of the state*.

From this follow several hypotheses concerning political consumerism.[10] Citizens in their roles as consumers face problematics of political nature that relate back to business practices. Following the idea of the concept of the state, citizens holding a cooperative understanding would be expected to deem it their duty to engage politically if observing production and consumption practices, which from a political vantage point need to be addressed and changed. Therefore, they would be expected to likely engage in political consumerism. In contrast, individuals who rely on free-market competition may tend to reckon no need for further intervention and action. They may rely on the market's ability to provide for a solution, and that one will automatically choose the 'right' products, as long as the market provides for the 'right' choices. Consequently, at the individual level it would be expected that:

H1 Individuals with a cooperative concept of the state are more likely to be political consumers than are individuals with a liberal concept of the state.

Similarly, cross-national differences in the levels of political consumerism might be a direct consequence of the predominant understanding of responsibilities in socio-political and economic spheres. According to the theory of the concept of the state, in some countries market-reliant approaches seem to dominate, while in other countries cooperation-based approaches. In the former, actors are described as focusing on mutual responsibility and consensus finding. In the latter, actors rely on free-market competition as means for coordinating their undertakings. The assumption is that those practices reflect a general pattern. Respectively, at the aggregate level, the concept of the state would be expected to explain the extent to which citizens engage in political consumerism within a country. Specifically, the magnitude of political consumerism should be systematically different depending on which concept of the state prevails. On the one hand, it would be expected to be higher in

[9] That is, either they may be pleased with the balance prevailing in the country and therefore regard it as an appropriate mode of operation or they may rather oppose it, e.g. due to perceived weaknesses or injustices, and instead strive for an alternative mode of operation. Additional factors influencing the view may be, e.g. political interest or individual social position. Yet, it may be assumed that citizens of countries with a democratic political system ideally are relatively satisfied with the prevailing system.

[10] Despite the importance of distinguishing between boycotting and buycotting as mentioned above, the following study centres on the global concept of political consumerism. This decision grounds on the fact that the theory investigated in this paper proposes that the concept of the state influences political involvement *per se*, and boycotting and buycotting both are forms of involvement.

countries with a 'cooperative' concept of the state than in countries with a 'liberal' concept of the state. On the other hand, for the 'mixed' group of countries, given the separation between private and public realms and the presence of a large, prominent public sector, citizens may be used to primarily focus on issues that concern the private. Moreover, if the state is supposed to control already a large part of business activities, citizens and firms might feel little in charge or pressure to change production and consumption practices. As a result, political consumerism would be expected to be lowest in these countries, as compared to countries where a cooperative or liberal concept of the state prevails. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H2a The extent of political consumerism is higher in countries where a cooperative concept of the state prevails than in countries where a liberal concept of the state prevails.

H2b The extent of political consumerism is lower in countries where a mixed concept of the state prevails than in countries where a cooperative or a liberal concept of the state prevails.

Finally, assuming that the individual concept of the state reflects a general pattern observable at the aggregate level and vice versa, all in all, it would further be expected that:

H3 The concept of the state can explain the magnitude of political consumerism in a country.

Research design

The hypotheses speak of systematic relationships among clusters of countries and of expected probabilities at the individual level. An ideal design would cover a comparative study of several countries and of individuals clustered within those countries. Unfortunately, cross-national data on political consumerism are scarce, and internationally available surveys of individual political consumerism are often difficult to compare as the foci of the measures vary. As an alternative approach, I combine two studies of which each considers one of the two levels in such way that they complement each other.

In a cross-sectional country study, I test the macro-level hypotheses (H2–3) through the comparison of multiple countries at a same point in time. To test the explanatory power of the concept of the state for the magnitude of political consumerism, I use linear regression analysis. The second study then breaks the investigation down to the individual level by the look at one exemplary case of the previously considered countries. The study employs survey data collected in Germany in 2014. This survey provides an original set of items measuring individuals' concept of the state. Using binary logistic regressions, it lets me assess how individual political consumerism relates to their concept of the state.

Table 1 Overview of country-level variables

Variable	Values	Main data source	Data year
Countries	Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK	Round 1 European Social Survey	2002/03
Political consumerism	Percentage of individuals/country involved in boycotting, buycotting, boy- *and* buycotting, non-political consumerism	Round 1 European Social Survey	2002/03
Concept of the State	Cooperative, Liberal, Mixed	Varieties of Capitalism Hall and Soskice (2001)	2001

Study 1: the macro-level

Sample and operationalization of the macro-level variables

The country study covers a subset of 20 European states (Table 1), based on fulfilment of three criteria: they are liberal democracies,[11] they have similar standards of living, and they have similar institutional settings. Moreover, they share a common (cultural) heritage (Stratenschulte 2014, p. 7). Yet, views of the roles of the state and the market, and on the preferred balance between collaboration and free-market competition vary (see Esping-Andersen 1990; Hall and Soskice 2001). This provides a sample of countries where the underlying structures diverge little. Instead, what varies is the notion of how interactions *within* those structures use to be dealt with, i.e. the concept of the state.

Testing the hypotheses (H2–3) requires measures for two main concepts: the concept of the state and political consumerism. Since no existing data set could be acknowledged uniting these variables, the data employed combine two sources. The dependent variable, *political consumerism,* is understood as aggregate fractions of citizens who boycott and/or buycott across countries. Few sources provide data on political consumerism for a larger set of countries and beyond boycotting only. The first round of the European Social Survey (ESS) fielded in 2002/03 is the latest of these few surveys.[12] Therefore, it serves as the source for the dependent variable, measured in terms of the percentage of people who in a country have buycotted and/or boycotted.[13]

[11] There, political participation can develop relatively freely; see in this regard also Stolle and Micheletti 2013, pp. 24–25.

[12] All later rounds of the ESS include only boycotting, which is too narrow to be considered a reliable measure of the degree to which citizens are engaged in political consumerism (see Zorell 2019).

[13] The specific wording is: *"There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?* [B21] *Boycotted certain products/* [B22] *Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environ-*

The main independent variable, the *concept of the state,* is defined based on Hall and Soskice's theory on the Varieties of Capitalism. Accordingly, the countries are classified in one of three categories: cooperative, liberal, mixed (see Table 1).[14] Besides, I include several control variables. Political consumerism is typically associated with wealthier countries and thus considered to be largely a product of income and citizens' 'leeway' in deciding whether and what to consume. To assess the concept of the state's explanatory power independent of economic background conditions, I include the *gross disposable income* of private households in a country in all models. Furthermore, several studies in economics have highlighted the different tendencies of citizens to save or consume their income (see e.g. Carroll et al. 1994). Therefore, I further include the *net private household saving rate* to account for cross-nationally different relative inclinations of citizens to use their income for consumption purposes (data for the year 2003; OECD 2012). Finally, citizens also need to be able to access the products they wish to buy for political purposes or alternatives to those products which they wish to boycott. Respectively, I include a measure of retail store density as proxy to take into account that the easiness to access product alternatives varies, which can make political consumerism more or less easy (in lack of figures for 2003, data for the year 2011 are used instead; Nielsen 2013, 26; 2015, 25).

Analyses and results

The theoretical framework posits that the concept of the state provides for an environment in which political consumerism can thrive more or less. Hence, countries with similar concept of the state would be expected to exhibit similar occurrence of political consumerism. These magnitudes are in turn expected to be systematically different across countries with distinct concepts of the state. Table 2 displays the results of a respective linear regression analysis. The explanatory power of the concept of the state is notable, holding the contextual variables income, saving rates and access to retail stores constant. This supports the hypothesis that the concept of the state can explain the overall magnitude of political consumerism in a country (H3).

To examine if tendencies are similar among countries with same concept of the state and different across them, I plot the (unstandardized) predicted percentage of political consumerism with regard to the concept of the state (Fig. 1). The result reveals a clear pattern: countries with a cooperative concept of the state range

Footnote 13 (continued)
mental reasons"; see the ESS1 Source Main Questionnaire (European Social Survey 2002) and ESS1 Appendix A3 ed. 6.4 (European Social Survey 2014, pp. 16–17).

[14] All but four countries included in the analysis are already considered by Hall and Soskice (2001): the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. However, these four countries overall display close parallels to the 'Mediterranean' economies in that cooperation takes place in a narrow realm of the private and the informal. Accordingly, for the purpose of this analysis, they are placed into the cluster with a 'mixed' concept of the state. In the end, the data set includes two countries with a 'liberal', nine with a 'cooperative' and nine with a 'mixed' concept of the state.

Table 2 Explaining political consumerism

Predictors	
Concept of the state	− 13.133** (3.73)
Disposable income	.001 (.001)
Household net saving rates	.090 (.592)
Retail store density	− .030 (.033)
Constant	48.636 (21.005)
R^2	.640
No. of observations	20

Cell entries are beta coefficients, standard errors (SE) and model performance statistics from linear regressions. Level of significance = *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

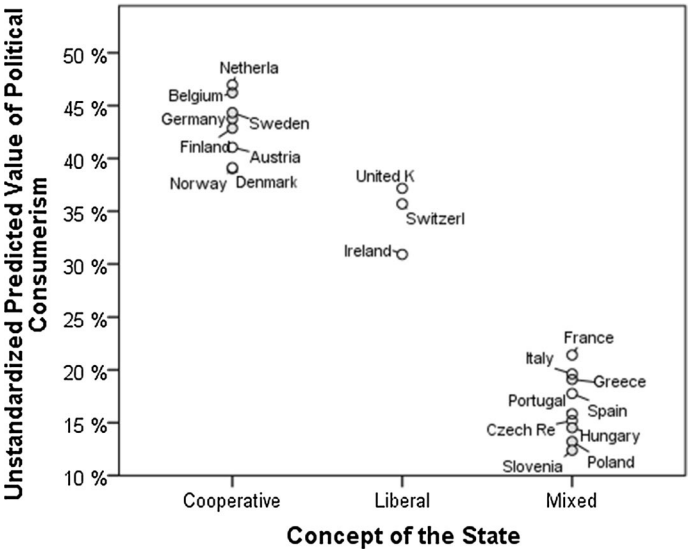

Fig. 1 Political consumerism in relation to the concept of the state. *Note*: The model which the plot is based on includes gross disposable income, net private household saving rate and retail store density

altogether in higher regions of the plot, i.e. greater magnitudes of political consumerism. Countries with a liberal concept of the state range in the middle, whereas all countries categorised as 'mixed' range on the bottom.

Additional tests including GDP and GDP per capita do not change the result in a meaningful way (see Fig. 4 in Appendix). The concept of the state remains a similarly strong predictor of political consumerism. Thus, rather than being a mere question of wealth and the 'luxury' of being able to take in moral standards when deciding what to buy and consume, as is often argued, the understanding that citizens have of the role of firms and of themselves in society seems to be a (more) decisive factor driving political consumerism. Where a cooperative understanding prevails, a particularly large fraction of the citizens is engaged in political consumerism. In

countries were a liberal understanding prevails, this fraction is somewhat lower, which confirms hypothesis H2a. Finally, in the 'mixed' group of countries where private and public realms are supposed to be divided realms, correspondingly, only few citizens take into account political considerations when purchasing. There, the extent of political consumerism is notably lower than in countries classified as cooperative and liberal market economies, which confirms also hypothesis H2b. In summary, the concept of the state shows to be apt to explain the extent of political consumerism within a country and differences across countries. Furthermore, the magnitudes are similar among countries with a same concept of the state, and different across distinct variants thereof—in other words, the magnitude of political consumerism varies *systematically* as a function of the prevailing concept of the state.

Study 2: the micro-level

Sample and operationalization of the variables

Study 2 shall reveal whether the pattern observed at the macro-level can also be observed at the individual level. To that end, I consider if an individual's probability to engage in political consumerism varies as a function of their concept of the state. I use data from an online survey that was designed for that purpose and carried out in Germany in March 2014. According to the theory, within a single country a certain concept of the state predominates. Nonetheless, at the level of the individual citizens, some citizens may endorse that same view, whereas other citizens may endorse another concept of the state. Consequently, the look at only one country can yet allow for developing a first impression of the plausibility of the theory that people hold different concepts of the state, and that this has consequences for their political participatory behaviours.

The survey respondents were recruited from the German online panel of an international research institute, which covers a cross section of citizens living in Germany.[15] The resultant sample is representative of the general population in Germany with regard to age, gender and education.[16] After adjusting the data set for invalid responses[17], the sample comprises responses of 1.350 individuals at the ages of 14 to 69.

[15] The survey relied on quota sampling, which as a non-probabilistic version of stratified sampling (Battaglia 2008, p. 523) facilitates a broad and systematic coverage of socio-demographic backgrounds (Häder and Häder 2014, p. 286). This allows for reflecting a wide range of views and conceptions relatively easily even in smaller or restricted samples.

[16] From the panel, 8.692 individuals were invited to participate, 4.120 started doing so, yet 2.558 fell out because of full quotas, and another 65 quit before the end. Table 4 in Appendix provides a descriptive overview of the sample composition. The table covers the variables which are typically associated with political consumerism; this gives an impression of how the dataset compared to previous studies.

[17] As invalid respondents count participants who completed the survey too fast, too little (that is, leaving out more than 4 questions, i.e. 10% of the questions), and/or who ticked "don't know" in more than 8 cases. This is intended to minimise non-response biases and to single out 'click-through' respondents, i.e. those who may not have participated genuinely. These criteria lead to the exclusion from 147 respondents, thereby reducing the sample of 1.497 individuals who have completed the questionnaire to 1.350.

Testing the hypothesis (H1) requires measures for two key concepts: the concept of the state and political consumerism. The *concept of the state* embraces five different ambits or actors towards which citizens may cultivate attitudes: the 'market', the state, NGOs working for consumer protection and representation, firms, and consumers. The survey includes an originally designed question that asks survey participants for evaluating the relevance of five principles in economic and consumer politics. Five items relate to one of the actors each.[18] The evaluation scale ranges from -3 (not important at all) to +3 (very important). The concept is understood as a binary classification mode according to which citizens have one or the other view. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) reveals one component (KMO = .758, χ^2 = 1124.156; $p < .001$; explaining 47% of the variance) reflecting the extent to which a respondent puts weight on the liberal compared to the cooperative principles in economic and consumer politics. For a comparative assessment, lastly, the variable is split at the median into a binary variable distinguishing between a cooperative (1) and liberal (2) concept of the state.

Political consumerism is assessed using three questions that ask whether in the past 12 months the respondents have boycotted, buycotted products and buycotted firms. The possible answers include three options: (1) never, (2) once or a few times, and (3) regularly. For the dependent variable, which distinguishes between having done so or not, the answer categories (2) and (3) are pooled. Also, buycotting firms, buycotting products and boycotting are merged into one common category for political consumerism.

Finally, to be able to put the results in perspective vis-à-vis already existing explanations for political consumerism, all analyses include the standard control variables age (in years), gender (1 = female, 2 = male) and education (measured in terms of five levels, i.e. degrees). Moreover, I include subjective social class assignment[19] (a categorical indicator ranging from 1 [upper social class] to 3 [lower social class]) and general trust (ranging from 1 [you can't be too careful in dealing with people] to 7 [most people can be trusted]).

Analyses and results

Hypothesis H1 expects that citizens with a cooperative concept of the state are more likely to be political consumers than are citizens with a liberal concept of the state. The dependent variable is coded 1 if a person is a political consumer, and 0 if not. Table 3 displays the result of a binary logistic regression analysis predicting the probability of being a political consumer. The first column covers the set of standard variables that are typically advanced to explain political consumerism. In line with previous studies, being young, more highly educated and having higher levels of

[18] The questions and precise information on how the variable is calculated can be obtained from the author.

[19] The survey includes no variable for income. Therefore, the analysis includes the social class to which respondents assign themselves.

Table 3 Antecedents of political consumer modes (logistic regressions)

	(1)	(2)
Predictors		
Concept of the state[a]		1.689** (.126)
Age	.924** (.020)	.906* (.021)
Gender	.897 (.119)	.871 (.124)
Education	1.263** (.054)	1.279** (.056)
Social class	.757 (.147)	.725* (.153)
General trust	1.100* (.036)	1.063 (.038)
Constant	1.964 (.445)	2.188 (.466)
Model fit		
Nagelkerke R^2	.062	.083
Cox and Snell	.046	.061
− 2 Log Likelihood	1654,890	1529,522
N	1287	1208

Cell entries are odds ratios (Exp[B]), standard errors (SE) and model performance statistics from binary logistic regressions. Level of significance = *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

[a]The reference category is the cooperative concept of the state

general trust increases the probability that an individual is political consumer. In contrast, gender and social class do not reach statistical significance here. Further analyses (not reported here, but see Appendix) revealed that only when drawing the distinction between boycotting and buycotting, gender and social class can predict, respectively, boycotting and buycotting.[20]

The second column in the table includes the concept of the state. Compared to the previous model, the coefficient for general trust turns insignificant, while for social class happens the reverse. The remaining coefficients change little. With regard to the concept of the state, the exponent being greater than one points out that citizens with a cooperative concept of the state are more likely to be political consumers than are individuals with a liberal concept of the state. In substantive terms, individuals with a liberal concept of the state are about half as likely to be political consumers than are individuals having a cooperative concept of the state, holding gender, age, education, social class and general trust constant.

The graphs in Fig. 2 illustrate the results in more detail. The *slopes* describe the changing predicted probability to be a political consumer for individuals with a cooperative and a liberal concept of the state with (1) distinct social class background, (2) increasing levels of education, and at (3) increasing levels of general trust. The *distance* between the two slopes depicts the different likelihood to be political consumer for

[20] Men are more likely to be boycotter than are women, while gender makes no difference for buycotting. Social class, in turn, affects only buycotting, in that individuals from middle to high classes are more likely to be buycotter than are individuals from lower social class. This ties in with the different nature of boycotts and buycotts, where it is the latter which require a person to have a certain degree of personal economic freedom to choose what to purchase, i.e. to focus on criteria other than only price.

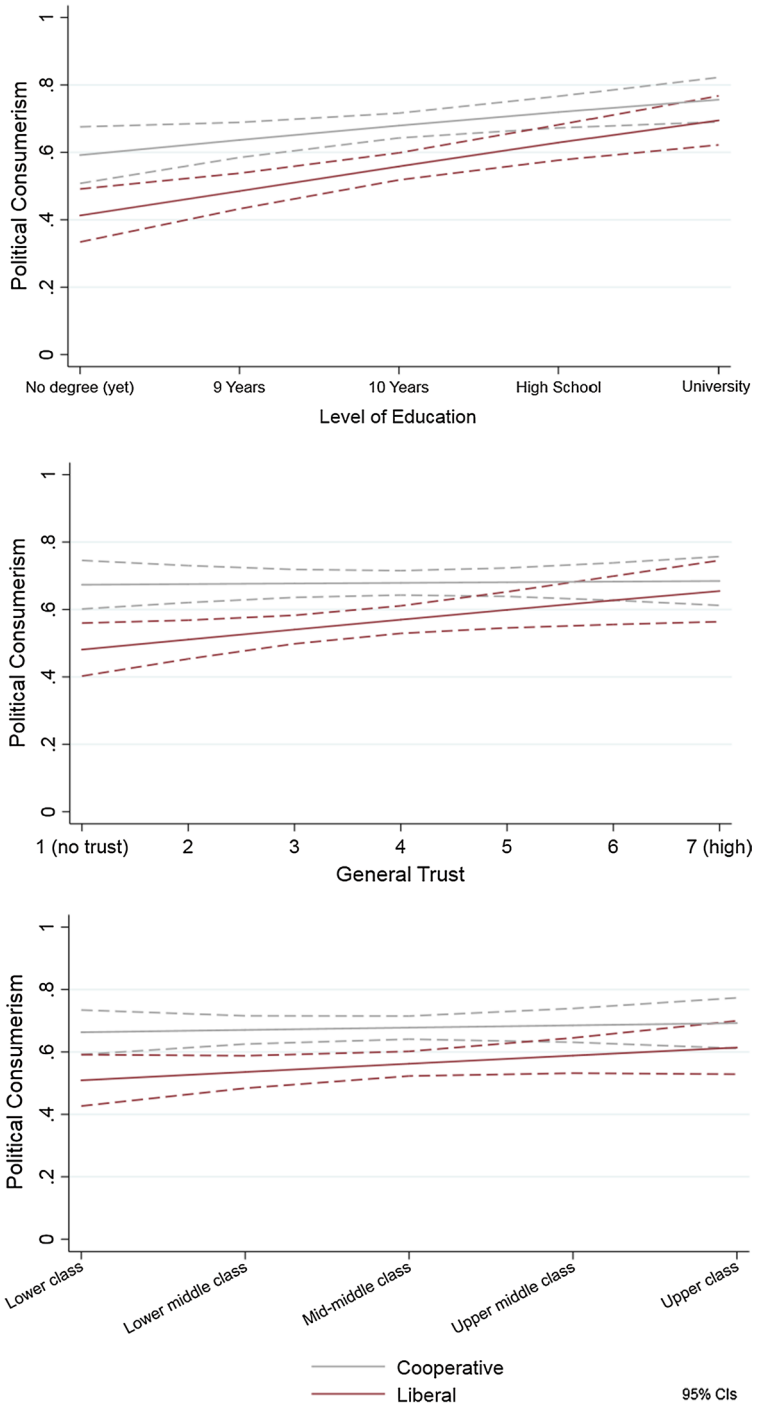

Fig. 2 Predicted Probability of political consumerism as function of the Concept of the State and Education, General Trust and Subjective Social Class belonging

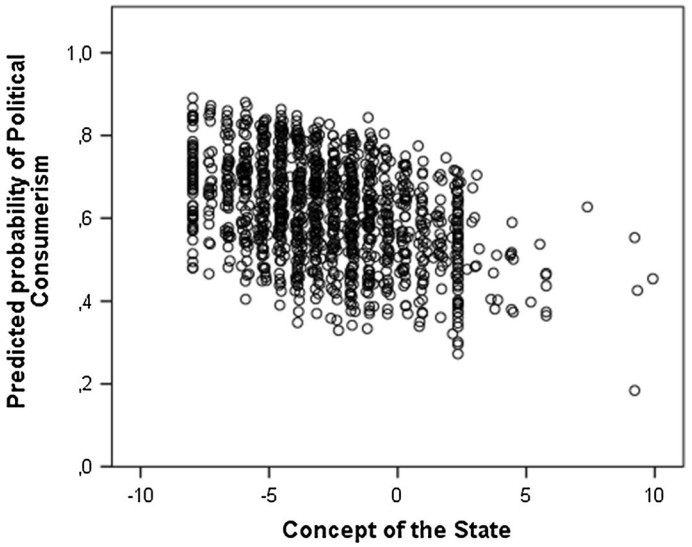

Fig. 3 Political consumerism and people's concept of the state. *Note* The more negative the values for the concept of the state, the more cooperative the view; the more on the right, the more liberal the view

individuals holding a cooperative compared to a liberal view. As the lines in all three graphs demonstrate, individuals with a cooperative concept of the state are generally more likely to be political consumers than are those with a liberal view, which clearly confirms hypothesis H1. The difference becomes further notable among individuals of low social class, lower educational background and high levels of general trust, which ties in with extant research.

As a final test, Fig. 3 plots the predicted probability of political consumerism for all individuals in the data set according to their mean evaluation of the five concept of the state items. In line with the classification of Germany as a cooperative market economy, the people surveyed tend towards having a cooperative understanding (negative values on the scale). Nonetheless, there are a good number of citizens with a liberal view, and they exhibit a consistent pattern according to which they are less likely political consumers than are those with the cooperative view. Altogether, these observations bolster the findings and give an answer to the research question. The general pattern of views in a country is also reflected in the individual citizens' views. Moreover, their individual concept of the state affects citizen's tendency to get involved politically and to express their concerns as citizen-consumers. As such, the concept of the state clearly contributes as explanation next to commonly acknowledged factors influencing participation.

Conclusions and discussion

Half of all goods and services traded today is part of global value chains (World Bank 2017; World Trade Organization 2015). This has furnished material prosperity all over the world, but also complex problems associated with the changing lifestyles. In this context, firms have become additional addressees for political concerns, and individuals' decisions taken in their roles as private beings (and consumers) have gained *political* meaning.

How citizens and firms respond to these developments varies notably from country to country. Stemming from the assumption that developments at the country and individual levels are intrinsically intertwined, this paper presents the *'concept of the state'* to tie in two aspects in a single concept: styles of interaction that predominate in a country's political and economic spheres; and individuals' attitudes concerning what duties and responsibilities belong to the state, to firms, and to citizens themselves in dealing with socio-political issues. The empirical application of the concept in two studies of political consumerism shows how the concept can contribute to understanding why citizens' participatory choices vary, both among individuals and across countries.

As the macro-level study illustrates, depending on which concept of the state prevails in a country, the extent of political consumerism varies. The micro-level study reveals that individuals are more likely to engage as political consumers if they have a cooperative concept of the state than if they have a liberal, i.e. market-reliant concept of the state. Tying in the two studies, the findings give an impression of how the concept of the state sets a general framework in which individual political consumerism develops more or less strongly: political consumers put pressure on the state and firms, and depending on what concept of the state prevails, these activities may encourage the development of either cooperative or market-based institutional responses. Hence, citizens' individual political participatory choices may not only resonate in larger magnitudes of political consumerism in a country, but it might also affect in what ways governments and firms respond to political consumer demands. Future analyses may investigate into how across countries the comparative spreading of rules and regulations, voluntary firm engagements or market-reliant approaches vary as a function of the concept of the state. What can be concluded from this study is that individuals' political participatory choices and the institutional context can be understood as mutually reinforcing feedback process.

From a more general perspective, political consumerism is only one mode of a wide variety of political participation modes that are gaining increased attraction among citizens worldwide. A distinct feature which all these modes share is that individuals flexibly use them also in their everyday lives. Thus, they meld together civic and private issues, as well as considerations relating to their individual lives and the macro-societal situation alike. The *concept of the state* connects attitudes that relate to the individual and country levels. Simultaneously, it connects the public-political with the private-consumer spheres. Thereby, it provides an analytical framework to examine these current political participatory developments precisely at the various levels and spheres where they occur, and at the same time at each level on its own.

Furthermore, the concept can shed light on the interdependencies between political-psychological drives of individual political participation and contextual determinants. In this way, the theory of the *concept of the state* offers a crucial starting point for developing an improved understanding of how macro-societal changes can eventually affect political participation and vice versa. Further on, the study of other forms of political participation can reveal whether indeed the here observed tendencies reflect a more general pattern that affects citizens' political involvement; that is, a set of enduring views which individuals hold, and which affects their decisions across domains and at different points in time.

The conclusions ground on a systematically and carefully elaborated combination of data from multiple sources. Yet, the mismatch of sources and years of the data, the age of the country-level data, and the different measurement of the concept of the state as general, aggregate measure per country in Study 1 and as individual-level measure in Study 2 are limitations which clearly advise to interpret the observations with care. A precise assessment of the connection between individual-level attitudes and general patterns at the macro-level will require the design or use of cross-national survey data looking at individuals nested within countries. In addition, the fact that the individual-level survey was conducted in only one country certainly confines the degree to which the findings can be generalised. To appraise the generalisability of the theory and to elaborate it further, equivalent analyses need to be conducted now in other cultural, economic and/or political circumstances and considering other forms of political participation. Covering individuals and countries both with similar and with different backgrounds will let compare patterns across countries. This will permit to discern whether the bond between the *concept of the state* and political consumerism may be assumed to apply also on individuals living in other circumstances than in Germany. Moreover, the replication using more recent, comparable data from, where possible, uniform sources can help specify whether the observed tendencies hold across space and time.

A key idea developed in the paper is the suggested mutually reinforcing process between macro- and micro-level conduct. Given the separation of the country and individual survey studies, the results give only a first impression of possible systematic connections and interrelated variances. To deal with the assumed causality in the process and to fully appraise the wider implications of this observation, longitudinal multilevel studies are now needed. This will give a more coherent understanding of what drives political participation and institutional actions in a permanently reconfiguring world. The conclusion that can be drawn from the present analysis is that parameters determining the behaviour are to be located at both individual and country levels, and these intertwined and environmentally contingent. The *concept of the state* provides a clear, broad and at the same time efficient construct for studying political participation fitting this entangled reality of modern societal life.

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Appendix

See Fig. 4 and Table 4.

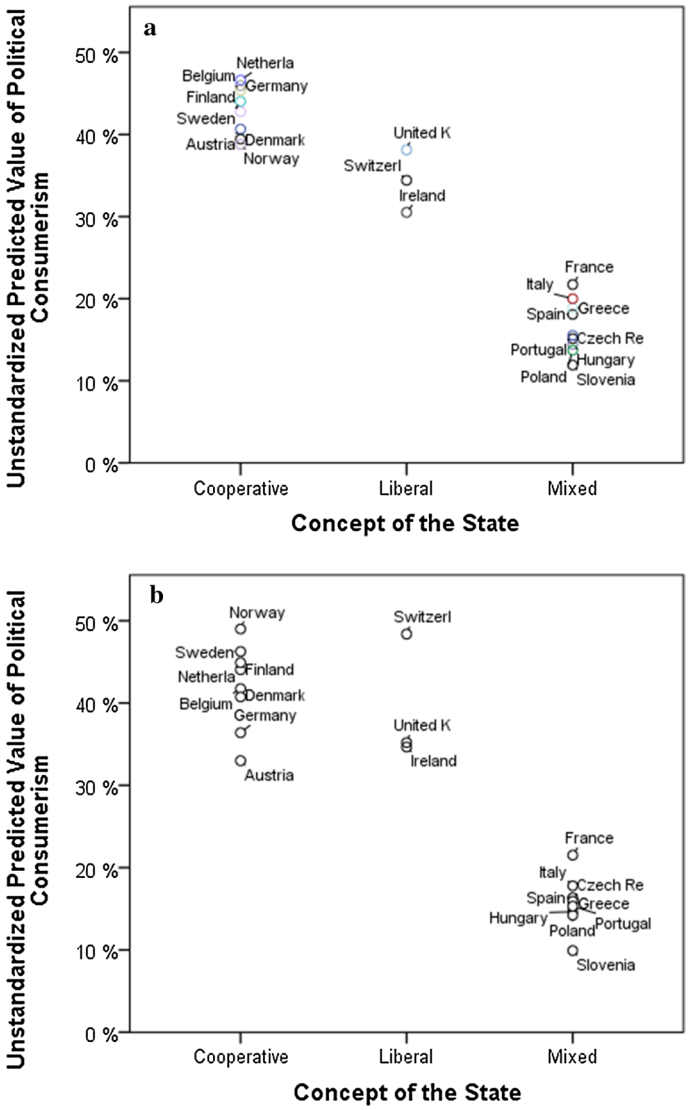

Fig. 4 **a** Political Consumerism in Relation to the Concept of the State and Accounting for Total GDP. **b** Political Consumerism in Relation to the Concept of the State and Accounting for GDP per Capita. *Note* The model which the plot is based on includes gross disposable income, net private household saving rate, retail store density, and GDP per Capita (2011)

Table 4 Descriptive overview

	Non-political consumers (n = 518, 38.4%)	Boycotter (n = 154, 11.6%)	Buycotter (n = 158, 11.7%)	Boy- and buycotter (n = 517, 38.3%)	Test statistics
Socio-demographics					
Gender					$\chi^2 = 7.500$**
Women	41	10	17	32	
Men	45	16	14	25	
Age					
14–24 years	35	17	16	33	$\chi^2 = 24.843$**
25–34 years	38	14	13	35	
35–49 years	42	15	15	28	
50–59 years	51	8	17	24	
60 and older	48	10	18	24	
Education	2.83 (1.08)	3.09 (1.16)	2.91 (1.20)	3.34 (1.22)	$\chi^2 = 68.589$***
No degree (yet)	34	14	21	31	
Grad. after 9 yrs.	56	11	16	18	
Grad. after 10 yrs.	45	13	14	27	
HS graduate or equiv.	28	16	17	38	
University or equiv.	31	12	13	44	
Social class	2.26_A (0.53)	2.26_A (0.56)	2.18_A (0.50)	2.17_A (0.50)	$\chi^2 = 10.761$**
Upper class	26	11	21	42	
Middle class	42	13	16	30	
Lower class	51	14	14	21	
Socio-political attitudes					
General trust	3.57 (1.65)	3.60 (1.52)	4.09 (1.60)	4.06 (1.69)	$\chi^2 = 34.934$***
Left–right attitude	4.04 (1.26)	3.89 (1.25)	3.90 (1.30)	3.53 (1.34)	$\chi^2 = 49.369$***

Table 4 (continued)

	Non-political consumers ($n = 518$, 38.4%)	Boycotter ($n = 154$, 11.6%)	Buycotter ($n = 158$, 11.7%)	Boy- and buycotter ($n = 517$, 38.3%)	Test statistics
Political interest	2.63 (0.88)	2.27 (0.87)	2.42 (0.85)	1.95 (0.71)	$\chi^2 = 115.265$***
Concept of the State	1.56 (0.50)	1.53 (0.50)	1.41 (0.49)	1.44 (0.50)	F(4166) = 5.548***

Cell entries are percentages or means with standard deviations in parentheses. Group differences are calculated using Kruskal–Wallis test on group differences. Means having the same subscript are not statistically different at 0.05 using a Bonferroni familywise comparison. The values are calculated based on the weighted data set. Gender: female = 1, male = 2; political interest: low values = high interest in politics; concept of the state: cooperative = 1, liberal = 2; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

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