Engagement through play?
The relationship between video games and political engagement

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Abstract

The presented research is an investigation of politics in video games. This is done with two overarching goals in mind. The first is to further the understanding of an under-researched area in both political science and game studies as well as human computer interaction. The second and main aim is to consider how games can be used to promote political engagement and increase the interest of the players in real world politics. Both goals were pursued using an interdisciplinary approach, introducing insights, methods and literature of Political Science and Political Psychology, with Human Computer Interaction and Game Design studies.

The first study sought to produce a clearer picture of the state of politics in games through a landscaping study among players. The study inquired into what players thought of as 'politics' and 'political' in games, what game titles were considered particularly political and how the presentation of politics in-game was perceived compared to real-world, everyday politics. However, it was not only games that were of interest to the study. It was also the players of such games themselves and how interested and engaged they were with politics. The study's findings showed that politics were most often associated with elements of institutional politics, especially cases of Use of Force and Diplomacy or Negotiation. Politics in games were perceived to be not very likely to be realistic by study participants, though this varied greatly between games. Participants themselves showed an elevated level of interest in politics. Their general gaming habit and motivations were in line with what the literature would expect from a 'typical' gamer population. There was furthermore a positive relationship between playing political games and interest and engagement with politics.

The study revealed the need for a common foundation and structure for debating and researching politics in games. This led to the development of the 'Politics in Games' framework, which sought to introduce and link political science and political psychology terms and concepts to the context of digital games, while also providing the ability to consider elements known to increase political engagement in games. The framework therefore was constructed as two variable sets, one specifically for political engagement and another for the general (political) environment in a game. The use of the framework was also two-fold: enabling the analysis of the politics within games, while also being applicable as a guide to develop and design games with political content and the potential for promoting positive political engagement.

To test the framework's ability to analyse games, both expert and non-expert users were asked to produce test analyses. The expert users' case studies were consisted of in-depth reports, whereas the non-expert users were asked to analyse the games through an online survey. Both user groups were able to

produce game analyses by using the framework as a foundation and produced comparable results. Using the framework also enabled users to consider areas of politics that were often forgotten or invisible in the previous study. Feedback and results from the online survey and case studies were incorporated into the framework and informed the following study.

In order to evaluate the framework's ability to be used as a tool for creative and design purposes a number of design workshops were held in which participants were asked to develop an idea for a political engaging game. In addition to the framework, a set of ideation cards based on the framework was developed. Participants used both framework and ideation cards, however for different tasks. While the ideation cards were used for creating ideas and discussions in group design sessions, the framework was found to be more useful for guiding the overall structure of game ideas and development. In addition, the ideation cards were considered to be especially good tools to convey political concepts. Participant groups tended to work according to one of two patterns. Their work was either ideation driven, starting with an idea or topic and then using the provided materials to build up on it, or alternatively it was material driven, using materials such as the framework or design cues to come up with an idea that was then further developed. The game design process itself was influenced by both internal and external factors. External factors included elements such as the framework and other provided materials as well as discussion in the workshop prior to the game designing exercise. Internal influences came from the participants' backgrounds, prior knowledge, experiences and opinions. Nationality in particular proved to be an influential factor, while professional or educational backgrounds were less important. Participants in the workshops thus exhibited similar influences and biases such as those often found in professional game development. Overall, the workshop showed how the framework was a valid tool in designing political engagement promoting games.

In summary, the research showed the importance of a common foundational language and terminology when talking about games in politics between different stakeholders. The user studies provided the ground to suggest that the Politics in Games framework is an effective tool to achieve this, both for analytical and creative purposes. These findings can furthermore have implications for the way we talk about games in politics and the media in general, as well as how we design games, both for education and entertainment. In politically uncertain times both understanding of, and participation in, politics and the democratic processes have become more crucial than ever before. This research thus hopes to contribute in its own way to a growing awareness of the importance of being politically informed and active.

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1. Engagement through play? An Introduction

The second half of the 20th century has seen great changes in both society as well as technological capabilities and progress. These changes are still ongoing and arguably have been more intensified since the beginning of this century. Often times technology has had a liberating effect, e.g. through advances in the medical field and the ability for easier communication through the internet. Concurrently, negative effects such as the destructive abilities of modern arms systems or the ongoing ideological split of many Western societies fuelled by the spread of 'fake news' and parts of the mass media reminding us that (technological) progress is not necessarily always a positive thing for societies and humanities as a whole.

In its most general intention, this doctoral research tries to contribute to the overall understanding of how technology can influence and change human behaviour. This is done with a view starting at the individual and moving on to how its actions and attitudes influence society at large.

In particular, it is concerned with how technology can influence and promote interest in politics and overall political engagement. The vehicle of choice or rather the particular aspect of technology that was chosen to further investigate for this undertaking is digital or video games, in particular those commercially made for entertainment purposes.

The project starts by taking stock of what has already been investigated on the topic of politics and games as well as political engagement through a literature review in chapter 2. The literature review is initially divided between the areas of politics and video games, which are then brought together in a third section. Taking stock of the literature is then followed by a survey of the gaming landscaping of 'political games' or games with politics in them in general in chapter 3. This landscaping exercise takes the shape of an online survey among gamers of several diverse and commercial examples of games with politics in them. The survey covers areas such as gaming habits

and attitudes, awareness of political elements in games as well as participants' general interest and engagement into politics. The results of the study do indeed suggest a link between playing games with politics in them and being interested and engaged into politics, but also reveals a gap between what players understand and see as 'politics' and 'political', particular in the gaming setting, and the much wider notion of 'political' found in political science. These findings inform and inspire the rest of the thesis. In response to these findings, a framework to discuss, analyse and design for politics in games and political engagement is introduced in chapter 4. The framework is both informed by political science and its associating research on political engagement as well as video game design concepts. Chapter 5 then takes the framework and tests it for its ability to analyse games for their political content and underpinning. This task is done in two steps. Initially, case study analyses using the framework by an expert in both political science and game design are produced and presented. In a second step, parts of the general gamer population are asked to use the framework to analyse a game of their choice through an online survey study. The way expert and lays use the framework is then considered and compared to one another. Following this, chapter 6 then investigates the framework for politics in games' ability to support the design of games with politics in them, especially a view to promote political engagement in the players. To this end, a set of ideation cards based on the framework is developed and introduced. Both framework and ideation cards are then used during a game design workshop, tasking participants with developing a game for promoting a political issue of their choice or political engagement in general. The ways both framework and cards are used and other issues arising from the design process are then discussed. Chapter 7 then brings the findings of all previous chapters together in order to take stock of what has been learnt, how the individual findings are connected and how what other issues have arisen through the research. It concludes and summarises the work, whist also reflecting further on the findings and considers next step in researching politics in games in general.

1.1. Motivation and background to the research

The initial motivation for this research stemmed from observing and learning about the ongoing disengagement of many parts of society with official political institutions and their representatives. A process not limited to, but particularly visible and recorded in Western democracies. This is especially apparent when considering the most common and arguably also one of the easiest ways to engage in (parliamentary) democracy: voting. Overall, the voter turnout for national elections as well as the number of individuals holding membership of a political party in most advanced industrialised countries has been on the decline in the last 20 to 30 years. On average in the UK for example, turnout has declined by 15 percentage points in the four decades, showing that this trend has been ongoing for a longer time. When looking at the group of young voters, this decrease is even more prominent, with a reduction in turnout of 28 percentage points in the last 20 to 25 years alone (Sloam, 2014). This and other related developments, such as the decline in trust into politicians and politics in general (Citrin & Luks, 2001; Muro & Vidal, 2016; Newton et al., 2018) has led to some commentators and scholars to refer a 'crisis of democracy' (Ercan & Gagnon, 2014; Zakaria, 2013). Many of these related developments that were already observed prior to seeing their overall effects on the political climate and levels of political engagement, were due to a variety of changes in society, the economy and civic activities. Most prominently the loss in social capital and community commented on by Putnam (1995), when he observed that Americans would now prefer to go 'bowling alone'. All of these contributed to the emergence of the 'politics of disengagement' expressed through citizens being alienated from traditional, institutional politics (Campos & André, 2014), and the most recent rise of populist politicians and movements (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Nagan & Manausa, 2018; Newton et al., 2018).

Political engagement itself is a complex construct with many contributing factors and many forms of expression. The most quoted contributing factor is probably the role of education and knowledge (Galston, 2001), especially in relation to civic education, which also makes taking political action more likely (Neuman, 1986). Another important factor in terms of political engagement and taking action is (political) efficacy, the feeling that one's action can have an influence on the political process (Finkel, 1985). This can be experienced through having the feeling that political institutions and elites allow oneself to have influence on the process, known as *external efficacy*, or through *internal efficacy*, one's ability or at least the belief thereof, to participate and understand the political process, including processing relevant information and communicating with them (Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Niemi et al., 1991). Political efficacy can also be enhanced through knowledge acquisition, which again shows its importance for political engagement overall. In addition to 'learnt' knowledge, live experience (Milner, 2002) and 'accidental' learning through encountering it through the media (Tewksbury et al., 2001) can also be counted towards this.

My decision to study the possibility for engagement through (political) video games is based on a variety of factors. On the one hand, there are practical considerations such as the size and thus outreach of the gaming industry, which has already taken over other big entertainment industries such as film for the last couple of years (Chatfield, 2009) and it is something a lot of young voters, my main group of interest, engage in already. At the same time, the average gamer is said to be now in their early 30s and in America alone 67% of all households supposedly play video games (entertainment software association, 2014), giving this potential to reach a wide range of the population overall, beyond my initial focus. Furthermore, creating specific apps or web services to test engagement through interaction might be perceived as artificial by participants and it seemed unlikely that young people who are not engaged in politics already would go out of their way to

interact with a game or app on politics if it was not for the purpose of a scientific study. I therefore propose to use and focus on video games which are already available 'off the shelf' as my study object of choice, as these seem more related to what individuals would use in a non-lab setting. For the same reason I decided to focus on entertainment rather than 'serious' games, as the latter is usually found in specific, usually education related, contexts that are not directly related with people's everyday activities.

From an academic point of view there is also further support for this approach as there are already several previous studies that encourage the existence of a positive effect of games on political awareness (Neys & Jansz, 2010; Waddington et al., 2013). Additionally there is a recent interest in 'civic games', with research often focusing on how these could foster civil education (Kahne et al., 2009).

There is furthermore also ample literature and discussion on whether video games can change individuals' behaviour that can also be taken into account and inform the discussion. Most prominent in this area is probably the discussion whether violent games can lead to violent behaviour (Adachi & Willoughby, 2011; Sestir & Bartholow, 2010) in the player, as well as how serious and educational games can make a positive contribution to one's learning experience (Blumberg et al., 2013).

1.2. Research questions, aims and objectives

There are two overarching research questions framing this work. The initial question is how (commercial) games can be used to promote interest in politics and political engagement. In order to further this question however, it

became obvious that we firstly must consider how we can talk about politics in games in a holistic way.

For these purposes an initial aim was to investigate the different ways politics can feature in games, especially vis-à-vis what political science considers as 'politics' or 'political'. The next step was to find out whether it is possible to find a common platform and understanding of 'politics' between different stakeholders, such as researchers, game developers and activists, giving all of them a common language.

These different stakeholders are obviously also interested in end products to use this common platform. The objective was thus to provide a tool that could be used for both analysing existing situations and games, while also proactively allowing for the development of new games on specific issues and areas and also allowing for comparisons between different games.

Concurrently, it also became apparent that not all that is 'politics' is easily visible for political 'lays', an additional aim in the process of providing everyone with a common platform was thus also to make unusual or 'hidden' aspect of politics more visible to everyone as well as help individuals to identify and reflect on politics in games in general.

1.3. General methodological approach

Due to the nature of the subject and the research questions asked, I am using a mixed-methods approach for my research. This way both objective and subjective aspects of the questions and general aims at hand can be considered and a more holistic overall picture can be obtained.

Quantitative methods and measures are used to investigate such things as interest in games, gaming habits and game design elements, in order to allow for a better comparison as well as overview on individual concepts.

Surveys with quantitative measures are also enriched with qualitative questions in order to better gauge the subjective impact of individual elements. In addition, it allows recording of specific nuances of the gaming experience that are not as easily quantifiable through broad categories.

These are supplied with more theory-based work, both from political theory and game design, when developing the Politics in Games framework. Finally, design approaches and focus- and group work activities are used to investigate the design practices around the topic. These findings are again supplemented with qualitative approaches such as thematic analysis to better understand the processes at hand.

Overall, while the work initially was heavily reliant upon traditional social science and physiological methods and approaches, its focus moved towards design methods and thinking (Fallman, 2008; Lawson, 2006) in the course of the doctoral research. This was not least due to the researcher's background, originating in political science and psychology. These disciplines thus lay the foundational knowledge, which then informed the design-based work. In this process, the researcher's approach evolved from a strictly positive science one, to a design based working process (Zimmerman & Forlizzi, 2014).

This is also visible in the different research activities the presented doctoral research is based on (figure 1, see also the appendix for a larger version of the diagram). While the first half of the work was dominated by user/player surveys, theoretical and conceptual approaches (chapters 3 to 5), this changed significantly once the second version of the Politics in Games Framework was developed. Following, the focus moved towards creative and design uses and approaches (Lawson, 2012) , as seen with the development of ideation card sets on politics in games and the final game design workshop (chapter 6).
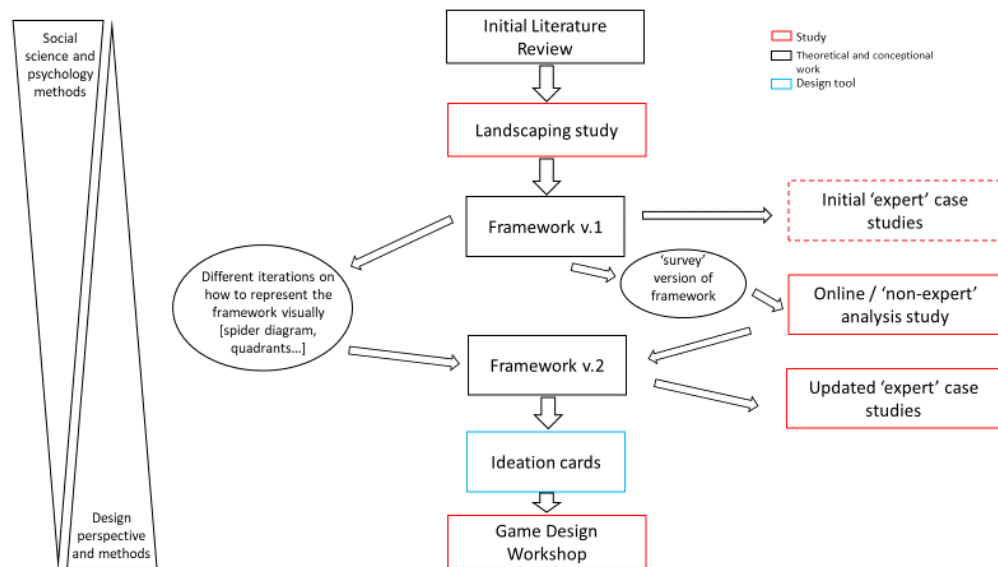
Figure 1 Overview on research activities and outputs

1.4. The nature and position of the research and its outputs

Moving on from the methods used and the disciplines contributing to the research, one point that should be considered before discussing its individual parts in more detail in the following chapters, is where it 'sits' in the world of knowledge and what its overall nature is, focusing in particular on the 'Politics in Framework' which is one of the central contributions of this research.

In its most basic understanding, a "[conceptual] framework is a body of academic knowledge revolving around a set of concepts" (Velt, 2018). Seeing how the 'Politics in Games Framework' is made up of several sets of (academic) concepts, the general categorisation and labelling as 'framework' seems appropriate. This does however not answer the question as to where it is exactly positioned vis-à-vis other theoretical approaches or constructs.

One way to describe and situate it would be through the idea of being *intermediate-level knowledge* (Höök & Löwgren, 2012). This expresses a space between the opposite forms of knowledge of theory, which applies to

everything in a general matter, and single knowledge instance, which only applies to a single entity and cannot be generalised. Intermediate-level knowledge concepts apply to a limited area of knowledge, in this research's (and the framework's) case, politics in games, but are not limited to a single case, as its application within the different case studies featured in previous chapters show, while also not being general enough to be an overarching theory, i.e. the framework works for and the research considers different format of games, but they do not claim to also work for other media such as film or television.

The positioning of the research and thus also the framework in this space seems thus fitting. This still leaves the issue of the nature of the framework to be considered. Höök and Löwgren (2012) introduce the idea of 'Strong concepts', which again only apply to a sub-spectrum of an area without having the breadth of a theory, which is also the case with the framework. "Strong concepts are generative pieces of knowledge in the sense that they help generate new solutions for a particular design situation" (Höök & Löwgren, 2012), based on the observations made during the design workshops, this also applies to the framework. However, as has been seen with the analytical survey study, it needs a good level of understanding of the concepts in order to use them correctly and create a design with the desired qualities. Furthermore, given how the individual concepts in the two variable sets of the framework are made of several potential (sub-) categories, it opens up the question of whether these individual values and their underlying concepts would individually be a strong concept each and the framework would then be a collection of strong concepts or whether the whole structure would be one big strong concept by itself. Given how the individual concepts relate to the values in the sets is a more universal application than the framework as a whole, it seems prudent to assume that, if we can indeed say that if this is indeed a strong concept, it would be the framework as a whole rather than its individual pieces. In addition to the above characteristic, strong concepts are also said to be provisional in nature. It could be said that this

would work with the notion of political engagement and how our understanding of the underlying factors in it are constantly evolving. The concepts underlying political engagement and politics in general are however set foundations of political science, and as such, far from provisional. While the exact part of the framework could thus be provisional and changing through different iterations, the foundations of it are not. Classifying the framework as a strong concept is thus not as straightforward as it initially seemed.

It seems thus necessary to consider other possible forms of (intermediate level) knowledge, in which the framework and the overall research would be a better fit. One of these are guidelines. These are operationalised general theories of knowledge spaces. In design these take the shape of what is particularly associated with Lidwell et al.'s 'Universal Principles of Design' (Lidwell et al., 2003). This notion does however not work for the framework, as, while it is informed by theories and knowledge about political engagement, the other concepts used in it, such as political methods and areas, are as mentioned above solid concepts from political science that are not necessarily theory bound or based. Similarly, the framework does not fit the notion of a pattern, as it does not represent an effort to describe and build best practice.

This leaves the possibility of the framework being best described as a method or tool. Its variables can be seen as different elements that can be used for the design and analysis process alike. In the process of doing so, the framework echoes Schön's notion of design as reflective practice that draws on repertoires for each task (Schön, 1987). Using the framework is both an exercise in reflection on the game and politics as well as using the different variables and their 'values' differently for each task at hand. In addition, methods as used in design are meant to externalise the design process for both the designers and third parties (J. C. Jones, 1992). The framework does this too, giving both structure to the process, while also allowing others to understand how the design was developed and compare it with others. The

basic structure and the way the framework is used is also similar to the basic ideas and processes associated with systematic methods of and in design, having an analytical phase - understanding the game or conceptualising its basic idea, a create phase – building from the initial idea and an executive phase, in this the game is actually produced (Dubberly, 2004). Considering how the framework fits with all of these different aspects of methods in design, characterising the framework as a method or tool seems overall a better fit for it than being a 'strong concept'. The nature of the framework is thus being a method to design and analyse political games or games with politics in them with a special emphasis on having engagement promoting qualities and elements. It is not a taxonomy as it does not provide clear categories in which to sort games. Instead, it provides means to analyse and compare them relative from one game to another.

There are however also other tools for analysing and designing that are worth considering and comparing when thinking about the framework's position in the overall field of design and analysis methods in game design. Two of the most interesting and better known ones that should be discussed at this point are Schell 'lenses' for game design (Schell, 2008) and Flanagan's work on Values at Play (Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014) and games for social change and activism (Flanagan, 2006; Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2007).

Schell's lenses for game design involve individual aspects and questions surrounding and related to the design of a (digital) game, that consist of a general theme, description and questions that should be answered in order to cover the 'lens' in question (see figure 2 for an example lens).

Lens #2: The Lens of Essential Experience

To use this lens, you stop thinking about your game and start thinking about the experience of the player. Ask yourself these questions:

- What experience do I want the player to have?
- What is essential to that experience?
- How can my game capture that essence?

Figure 2 Example for a lens from Schell, 2008

There are 112 lenses in total. They touch on issues starting from the game designer, their aims and other considerations such as who to work with and whether a project is a financially and temporal viable, over the to-be-designed game, its theme, mechanics and the technology and general processes involved in making the game, to the player and their gaming environment to finally the overall gaming experience, which is linked to the other areas such as game world building, where the game is played and others. Please see figure 3 for an overview of the different lenses and the areas they cover.
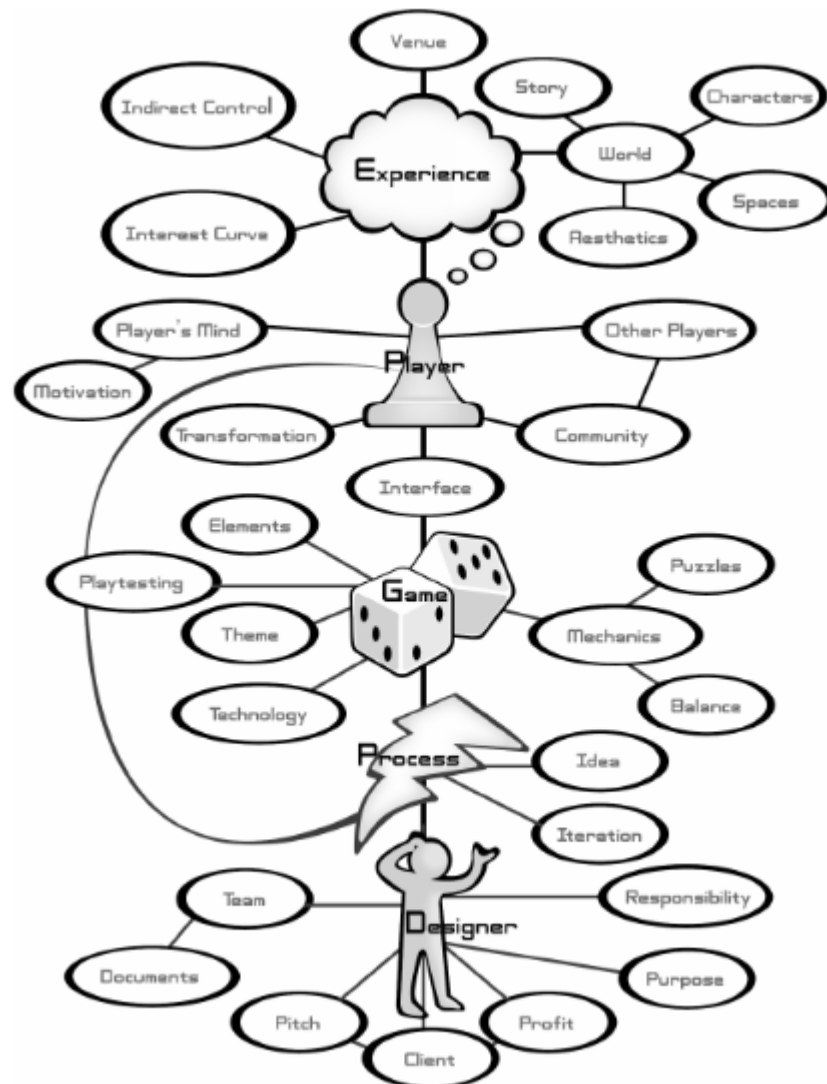
Figure 3 Schell's lenses for game design (taken from Schell, 2008)

While therefore very varied and wide in its applicability, it is not a 'one stop' design approach, as the author says themselves "we have no periodic table [in game design]. We have our own patchwork of principles and rules, which, though less than perfect, allows us to get the job done" (Schell, 2008, p.xl). The lenses are therefore more a collection of rules and principles that the author considers good and useful in order to view and question a game from as many perspectives as possible in order to make good design happen.

In the most general sense, Schell's lenses could be described as a framework in itself, or an overarching framework of small frameworks (the lenses),

though without any individual part of it being mandatory. In some ways, it can be argued that the Politics in Games framework could be treated as a more diverse or bigger 'lens' in the context of this framework. While some of the 'lenses' reflect approaches and concepts that are also important to the Politics framework, such as designing with a particular affect (lens 1) or change in behaviour in mind (lens 110), other concepts such as level of agency are not directly mentioned. There are thus elements that the Politics in Games framework could contribute to the lenses. At the same time, the lenses could also be used to guide the overall design process when using the framework for working on the political elements of a game. They are thus not mutually exclusive and on the contrary, can benefit one another.

Practically speaking, there are several possible ways the approaches could be used with one another. One could be the above-mentioned use of the lenses for the general design process, and the framework for the 'politics' part. Alternatively, some of the framework 's variables could also be turned into several lenses themselves and then used together with the other lenses. These could include such notions such as 'forms of politics', 'political activities', 'values' or 'political overtones'. Finally, it would be also be possible to solely use the lenses that are related to politics or used 'to do' politics, e.g. methods, and use them to further the use of the framework.

These possibilities and the state of being not mutually exclusive reiterate Schell's observation that game design makes use of a variety of principles and rules, which differ in circumstance and requirements, making it possible and at times necessary, to use elements from different approaches to produce the best possible design.

Flanagan's work on the other hand is less interested in general game design principles, but instead focuses on specific areas and uses. These are designing for and with specific values in mind as well as making games for social activism.

Her work over the years (Flanagan, 2006; Flanagan et al., 2007; Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2007) contributed to the overall 'Values at Play' approach (Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014) , a heuristic made for the systematic inclusion of values into the game design process.

The 'Values at Play' approach consists of three main components: Discovery, implementation and verification. In the discovery phase, the values important to the game are identified and considered in the context of the game. During implementation, these values are then translated into game elements. These can be anything from individual mechanics, aesthetic components such as art or music or even the very code of the game. In the verification phase, it is then considered whether the values meant to be built into the game, are really in it in an appropriate way. This form of 'quality control' can for example be done through play testing. The overall process is however iterative (see figure 4), and thus individual phases are likely to be repeated several times in the overall game development.
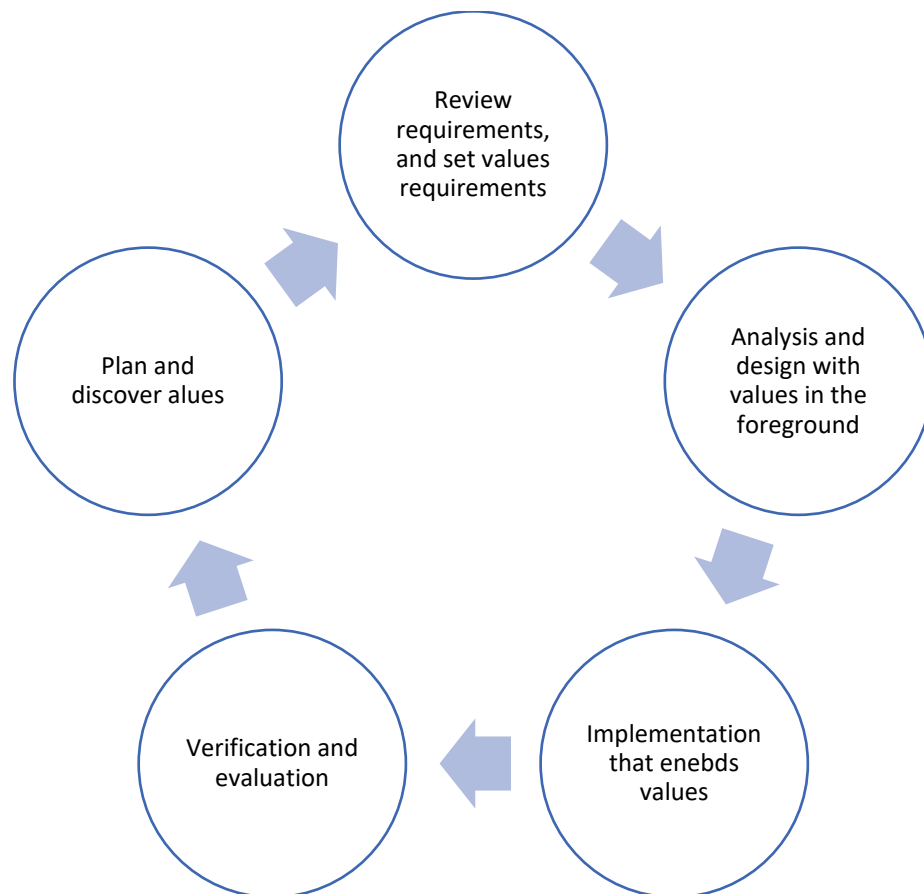
Figure 4 The Values at Play development cycle (taken from Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014)

The values informing the game design should stem and be identified initially from four different source: Key actors, i.e. everyone involved in making the game, the game's functional description, societal input, considering context and standards and finally by technical constraints that need to be considered.

As an additional tool in the overall design process, as well as a way to discover and discover values in existing games, the 'value cards' were developed and introduced (Flanagan et al., 2007). This card includes a number of values, such as diversity, justice or environmentalism, with one value per card. When drawing a card, users are asked to think of an existing example for this in games or opposite to this, an example where this value is violated. The value cards were then further developed into 'Grow-a-Game' (Tiltfactor, 2007), a card set made for the design of games, including values, verbs, existing games and challenges.

While thus both, Values at Play (VAP) and the Politics in Games framework, aim to create an (emotional) response in the player that may change their behaviour and attitude, they do so in different ways, focusing on different concepts. VP focuses on values in the game, whereas the framework is informed by political psychology and is not limited to values as its theme or focus. While values are an aspect of the framework, it is only one aspect rather than its sole focus. 'Politics' and 'values' are both concepts that can take on different forms and are thus found in situations not always associated with them. They are slightly different ways of expressing knowledge however, one being a framework, contrary to the other being a heuristic. It is therefore also not surprising, when observing that VAP is design focused, whereas the Politics in Games framework is made with both analysis and designing in mind. They inhabit a similar space, but have different approaches to the topic.

The two card sets related to VAP are similarly different to the Politics in Games ideation card set, discussed in chapter 6. However, the latter is able to do both analysis and ideation, whereas the VAP approach needs two different sets for the tasks.

In an overall comparison of their positions in the general knowledge space, this 'Politics in Games' research sits (again) on an intermediate level, between Schell's lenses and Flanagan's Values at Play (see figure 5). One is as general as possible, whereas the other is as concept specific, focusing on values, as possible. 'Politics in Games' in the meantime is not as general as the lenses, as it is only interested in a sub-area, yet still has the whole of VAP as a sub-notion, thus being still more general. It has thus the potential to be a linking practice between, and to the two extremes of general, high level design and more specific, purpose driven design approaches. Considering the complexity of the space overall, an intermediate level approach is important to have, in order to cater for an extended range of cases existing between the extremes that is context aware (contrary to high level approaches), while still being

flexible enough to be not too context dependent as can be the case with specific, purpose driven approaches.
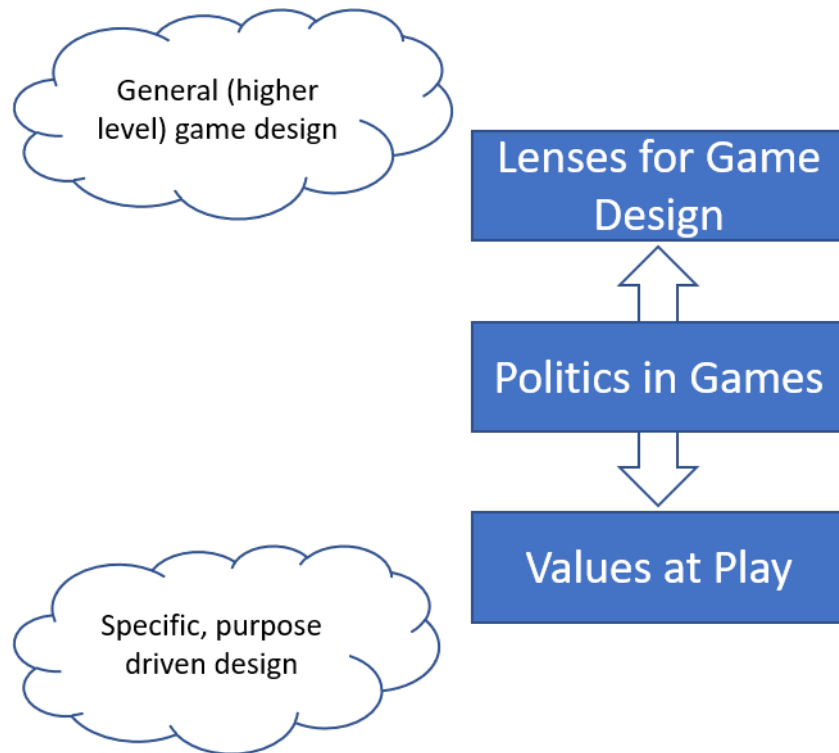
Figure 5 The position of the Politics in Games Framework in the knowledge space

Thus, when considering the three approaches in regards to which is one is preferable to use, it seems advisable to remember Schell's comments on how there is no 'one method for everything' in games design yet. All the three are positioned in the different locations, with different focuses and ability to work better for certain tasks. There is therefore no 'best' approach, but instead only one that is most suitable for the task at hand, general game design, analysis or talking about specific topics. They are furthermore not mutually exclusive and therefore should be combined and mixed when necessary and appropriate.

On a different more reflective note, when starting this research on politics in games, the notion of promoting political engagement and interest through games was of particular interest. Through the different studies, more insight into the relationship between the politics and games and their effect on the

player has been gained, e.g. how knowledge of politics and history can improve one's enjoyment of a game and how playing games with politics in them is related to general higher levels of interest and engagement with the matter outside of the gaming world, which previously was more associated with purposefully educationally serious games (Barthel, 2013; Gordon & Baldwin-Philippi, 2014; Neys & Jansz, 2010). The exact mechanism behind these relationships are however outside the scope and constraints of this doctoral research. The framework however offers a foundation to work from for any future endeavours into the area that could be substituted by the other approaches.

1.5. What is politics?

When hearing the term 'politics' the first association of most people is usually connected with something do to with parliament, the Prime Minister or political parties. This, the idea of politics as governance and a form of rule that can take different forms, is however only one aspect of the many forms politics can have.

Politics in its simplest and most raw form is concerned with power, especially power over a social body. This could be anything between international bodies such as the European Union down to the local government level. These bodies make up what is usually referred to as *institutional politics*. But politics also exist in the workspace or loose social structures such as friendship circles. As such, politics can also be viewed as "constraint use of social power" (Goodin & Klingemann, 1998 p.8). In addition to this, there is also the way of looking at politics through the perspective of who gets what from political actions. This is often referred to as *distributive politics* (Lasswell, 1950). Related to this are also the concepts of regulative and redistributive

politics, which take slightly different approaches to containing power and making sure that its distribution is done according to certain patterns.

This also points towards other big issues in the field of politics, namely social economic factors and how they shape power and political situations as well as the related field of identity politics. Social economic issues have traditionally been considered as one of the driving factors behind an individual's political behaviour, most prominently through political socialization within the family and environment in one's youth, leading to an overall stable political attitude and identification in adulthood. Societal change in the last decades have however proven this assumption to be not as strong as originally considered and today's research suggests a diverse range of theories of how political attitude and behaviour comes about (Houghton, 2009). Identity politics on the other side first came to the forefront of political discussion through the civil rights movement in the US, though do not need to be limited by ethnicity. The focus here is on the interests and perspective of individuals brought together by a shared identification, leading to more or less organized social groups. Most commonly, these groups are part of a minority in a given society, thus making identity politics very much about the relationship between minority and majority and how the former can influence, and be protected from, the latter.

Identity politics can be both personal as well as organisational and as such sits between what is known as the spheres of *formal* and *informal* politics. Formal politics includes any form of official governance related politics and any official public bodies. Informal politics on the other hand can either be found in non-institutional organisations, such as the workplace or the social organisation of a group of friends as well as the private politics of an individual. The form of a political organisation is thus not limited to official, potentially voted on, groups of representatives and leaders.

The latter also pinpoints to the fact that politics can happen on different *levels*. This can be anything from the international sphere of the United Nations to the local council or neighbourhood association, down to the level

of the individual. There are furthermore what is known as political *methods*, the ways politics can be 'made'. At the heart of these, given how politics is after all about power relations and the constraint of power, they all more or less pursue the promotion of or forcing on one's will to others. 'Classical' methods include anything from negotiations, making laws to exercising various forms of force.

Finally, there is also the sphere of beliefs and ideologies that form an important part of what 'politics' is about. They are the foundation that lead to political action in the first place and as such are closely related to not only traditional institutional politics, but also various forms of activism and identities.

1.6. What is a game?

When talking about games, the first thing that comes to mind is the notion of play and playfulness, contrary to non-playful actions that are done for a particular purpose (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2019).

Huizinga in his classic 'Homo Ludens' (1949) describes play as essential to the formation of culture. More so, it predates culture as it can already be observed among animals. As such, play is also essential to humans and the development of humanity. Huizinga describe the very nature of 'play' as being an extraneous, voluntary and instinctive activity that can be both physical and imaginative and stands apart from 'normal' life. Yet many everyday experiences can have playful experiences to them. In this context, he also coined the idea of the 'magical circle', a place in time away from 'normal life' with its own agreed customs and rules. These 'play customs' can become 'rules' of conduct in real life, which is then how a culture can develop.

According to some game scholars however, especially Roger Coillois (1961), who build up on Huizinga's theories, there is quite a distinctive line between

'play' and 'game', with both lying on opposite ends of a spectrum. Play or '*paidia*', according to Coillois, is an unstructured, spontaneous activity, it cannot be serious. A game, or '*ludus*', on the other hand is a rule based and explicit activity. It is in this way a formal system. The participants in a game consciously or unconsciously agree to abide by the 'rules' of the game when they first engage in it.

He (Callois, 1961) furthermore introduced four sub-categories for games: *Agon*, competitive play such as sports, *Alea,* games focusing on chance, *Mimicry*, such as simulation or role play, 'acting' and copying something and finally *Illix* or thrill based games, such as being on a rollercoaster.

Other approaches to distinguishing 'games' from other activities and concepts have started off by drawing the main difference in these objects by distinguishing them as being either art, which exists for its beauty, and entertainment, which is created for profit. Entertainment can be interactive or non-interactive. Interactive entertainments are 'play things', which either can have goals, when being a challenge or not, then being considered a toy. Challenges can either be solitary experiences, such as puzzles, or competitive, which then can lead to conflict. A challenge in which an individual is in competition and conflict with another and is able to interact with the other is a game (Crawford, 1984, 2012). This was then followed up (Moriarty, 2011; Parker, 2018) by defining play as a superfluous action, that does not have a structure and a toy as something that elicits play. A game is thus a toy with rules and a goal and therefore has structure. This is different from a puzzle, which is a game with a solution. The idea of structure as the defining element was also carried on in Kampmann Walther's (2003) definition of play and games. Play is an open-ended territory, focusing on make-belief and world-building, which is endangered by the intrusion of reality in the space. Games on the other hand take place in confined area, with the main challenge being interpretation and optimization of rules.

A video game can thus be seen as an interactive digital artefact for entertainment purposes that is structured by certain rules and goals. It

features (competitive) interactions with others and in one way or another is set apart from the 'real world' (Stenros, 2017).

One way this structure and these rules are expressed is through (video) game mechanics, that affect the way a game is played. The other major influence on it is a game's overall narrative. While the exact relationship between the two and how they interact with one another is far from straightforward, the two together have a major influence on the overall player experience (Elson et al., 2014).

With this initial overview on methods as well as objects and concepts of interest for this research, the next step is a broader overview of the fields and related topics through a literature review, which can be found in the next chapter.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Politics

2.1.1. Political Participation and Engagement

The traditional and still most dominant view on how political engagement is created and strengthened is particularly focused on the role of knowledge (Galston, 2001). Knowledge, the literature argues, is the foundation to engaging and action taking (see figure 6). The overall process is thus the following: an individual has a base level of knowledge on politics and the overall political process. Through learning more about it, they are able to deliberate about it and understand it better. This leads to what is described as 'political sophistication'. Through this process and further deliberation, an individual forms their own opinion on a particular issue or politics in general. When getting into contact with others that have their own opinion, both engage in discussions. These either strengthen or change an individual's opinion. If an opinion is strong or important enough, and the individual is thus engaged with it, it will become a cause for which to take actions. These can be anything, ranging from going to vote in an election to engaging in forms of activism to running for a political office (Neuman, 1986).
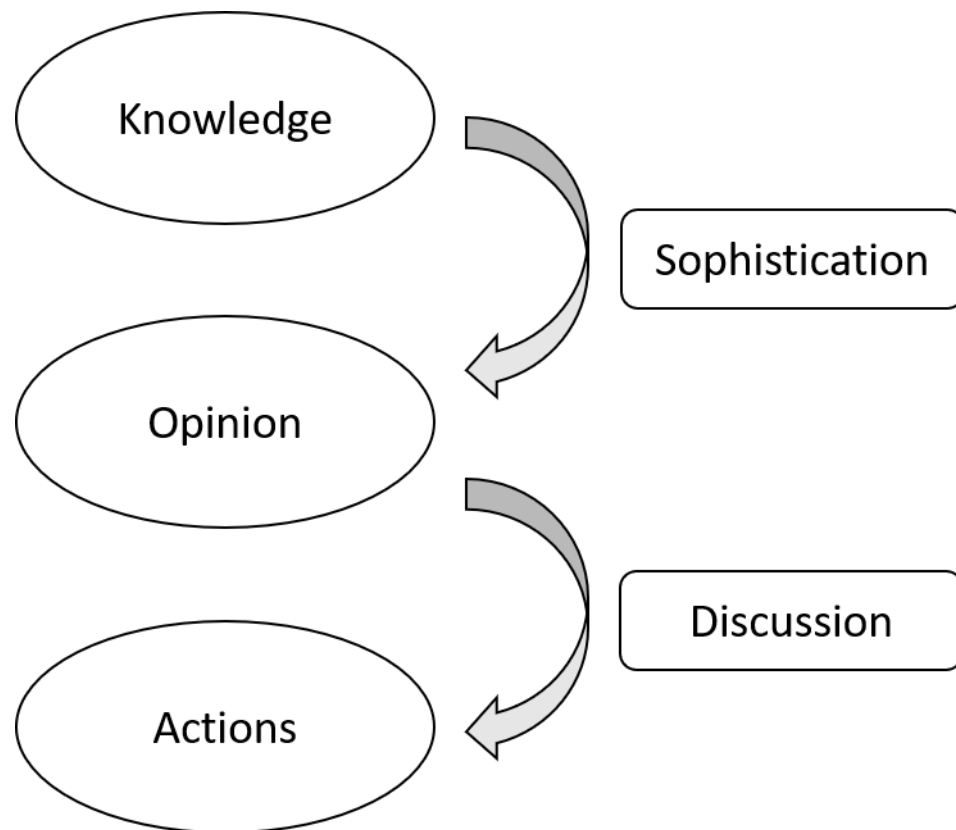
Figure 6 The process of political engagement (adapted from Neuman, 1986)

With the advent of new digital technologies and the internet, some of these classic or traditional views and approaches to political engagement have been challenged (Gordon et al., 2013).

Some of the more enthusiastic observers saw the internet as a new 'public sphere' (Poster, 1995), which eventually would take over more traditional means of political involvement (Barber, 1998). This also led to the rise of the 'replacement hypothesis' (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000), which foresaw the internet as main source of political knowledge and political mobilisation in the future. This also gave rise to the fear of how inequality in accessing technology and the internet could lead to long-term disadvantages in participating in the political process (Morris & Morris, 2013). At least in the first decade of the 21st century this 'replacement thesis' did however not come true (Jensen, 2013). If anything, the relationship between political participation and technological advances turned out to be more complex than

initially expected, with simply replacing or substituting old process, e.g. campaigning or political party proceedings (Cantijoch et al., 2013; Gerl et al., 2018), not being enough or not being as successful as anticipated. Similarly, using approaches that can work well in other areas, such as gamifaction, to increase public participation in the political process, can also come with its own risks (Foxman & Forelle, 2014; Thiel et al., 2016).

However, what was initially referred to as 'mobile media', or "mediated social connectivity while the user is in physical motion" (S. W. Campbell, 2013), with the advent of mobile (smart-) phone technology as well as the rise of social media have probably been the most high profile cases of how technology has indeed influenced political participation and the political discourse (Martin, 2014; Warren et al., 2014). In regards to social media use, some studies have shown that using it for news purposes does indeed positively affect political participation both on- and offline, however when used for social interaction purposes, this is not the case, apart from being a means of potential personal political expression (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). This is also reflected in meta-comparisons (Boulianne, 2015) , suggesting that the positive correlation found overall is not always statistically significant and political participation is not directly or at least entirely caused by social media consumption. Unintended encounters with political information on social media may however lead to overall increased levels of political participation online, thus being potentially one way to close the engagement gap between citizens (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2015). This phenomenon is however not limited to social media use and is heightened at certain periods in time such as election campaigns that see a higher frequency of coverage of politics (Hamilton & Tolbert, 2012; Kim et al., 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2001). With the recent rise of the issue of 'fake news' on social media platforms as well as the emergence of social media personalities, the problem of misinformation as well as the political influence of individuals online and their effects on political behaviour and attitude has moved into the focus of academic research (Valenzuela et al., 2019; Weeks et al., 2017). Initial research suggests that prolonged and

dominant exposure to fake news promotes feelings of inefficacy, alienation and cynicism toward the political process (Balmas, 2014). Concurrently, and also fuelled by this, is the issue of filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011), either produced by individuals and/or the algorisms used by social media platforms. These lessen the likelihood of individual users being exposed to news items that do not correspond to their own point of view, leading in time to further ideological polarisation, both on and offline (Spohr, 2017).

The diversity of the above described aspects of how digital technology and in particular the internet can influence political behaviour and attitudes shows just how complex the relationship between these two areas is. Given the ongoing changes and progress in technology, it is unlikely to become any less complex in the future. Whether these changes will be good or bad for political participation and engagement is yet to be seen.

2.1.2. Politics as represented in fictional media

Studies on the general use and consumption of mass media have seen them positively associated with voting behaviours (Pinkleton et al., 1998), especially in times of campaign coverages. Recent years have seen an increased academic interest in the representation of politics across different mass entertainment media and how this depiction may influence the media's consumer perception of politics. Research has mostly focused on television and movie productions, showing that there is indeed a tendency for viewers to be influenced by fictional politics when it comes to their overall assessment of 'real life' politics. A case in point is Fielding's (2014) research on the increased depiction of 'sleaze', various forms of corruption and abuse of power, in television dramas during the New Labour governments and how this could influence viewers' notion of how honest politicians were. Similarly, other British politics themed tv series such as 'Yes, Minister' and 'The Thick of

It' have been said (Basu, 2014; Granville, 2009), although while being billed as comedy or satire, to contribute to people's overall cynism towards politics (van Zoonen & Wring, 2012) through their depiction of the 'political machine', with politicians being incompetent, public servants running the 'machine' and the populace being a means to stay in a position of power and influence. While not all depiction of politics needs to be exclusively negative, as for example can be seen when looking at the audience's reaction to *The West Wing* (van Zoonen, 2007b), there is nevertheless a tendency for a less favourable image of politics, not least because it makes the overall plot and setting more interesting, which then can lead to an overall negative view on politics and politicians in general. One good example is *House of Cards*, which observers have called an anti-thesis to *West Wing* in many ways, with a strong emphasis of conspiracy over 'clean' politics (P. Jones & Soderlund, 2017) and with an overall message of "no hope for change" (Fritz, 2015, p.147).

These shows having an effect on the audience is due to these media giving viewers the resources to, as Van Zonnen puts it, 'perform a political self' (van Zoonen, 2007, p.532-4533). Through the medium and the performed self, it is possible to either describe politics through the given content, reflect on the situation, pass moral judgement on politicians or enable them to fantasies about their aspired political outcomes, which overall can help and increase an individual's political engagement. However, if the depiction of politics is predominantly negative, it may also have a repellent and discouraging effect.

One alternative way to look at and explain the representation and effect politics has in modern media is looking at it and the tv series or drama it can be found in as a 'cultural presence' (Richardson & Corner, 2012). People turn to culture to find meaning. As such, popular culture has also been referred to as a 'teaching machine' of everyday life, which is turned to make sense of the world around us, leading to the notion of living in a 'dramatized society' (Williams, 2003). If the media, especially television, is used to understand what 'politics' means, it thus is very likely that it influences what people believe and feel about politics.

What makes politics as shown on television series so different and potentially influential, is that they, rather than primarily depict government institutions, use the less direct approach of "the dimension of everyday life in which people are variously caught up in power relations" (Richardson & Corner, 2012, p.925). Including elements of everyday life and 'ordinary people' makes politics in tv series a lot more approachable and relatable for an audience (Coleman, 2008).

In addition, the storytelling aspect of the medium of film allows for the portrayal of a view on politics that is not mediated by news outlets and journalists and instead allows the viewer to witness aspect of politics, e.g. deal-making and other forms of negotiations, that are usually hidden from the average citizen's eyes (Randall, 2011). Making it both intriguing and new for the audience, but also being more open to writers' loose interpretations and ideas of how these processes actually work, often catering more for the need to entertain rather than being truthful to the actual processes. Concurrently, politicians' depictions in film make them also potentially more human, showing their motivations and struggles, which again makes them more relatable for the audience unlike many actual politicians. Finally, the depiction of politics in film and television is also a representation of not only how the writers, but also the audience, view and feel towards politics, both past and present (Bailey, 2011). As such, politics in television series have also been observed as being used to work through political and social tensions in a society in ways that would not be possible through non-fictional outlets. Examples of these are telenovelas in Brazil and their discussion of ongoing agrarian reforms or corruption in China (Bai, 2012; Hamburger, 2000; Pastina, 2004).

2.2. Games

2.2.1. The state of the gaming industry and games as subject of academic study

Video games have grown into a more serious medium that is no longer 'just for kids'. When looking at recent statistics, it appears that the average video game player is actually 31 years old (entertainment software association, 2017). The video game industry now makes more money than music and film industries together (Parsons, 2019), both showing how video games have matured a lot in recent years. This is also expressed in growing understanding and acceptance of video games having the potential to be an art form in their own right (Bogost, 2012; Jenkins, 2005; Smuts, 2005). From an academic point of view, this is accompanied by the appearance of 'game studies' and 'game design' as a research area on its own as well as a growing number of programs on game design on undergraduate and master levels (Annakaisa, 2015; Eskelinen, 2001; Gee, 2006; Lankoski & Holopainen, 2017; Schell, 2014).

2.2.2. Games for learning and education

The positive effect play can have on children's development and learning has been observed in developmental and childhood studies for a while (Samuelsson & Fleer, 2008; Singer et al., 2006; Wood & Attfield, 2005). The usefulness of games for learning and in educational settings is however not limited to childhood play. As such, digital games have been the object of interest in regard to their educational and learning promoting and supporting abilities as well (R. Ferdig, 2009; R. E. Ferdig & de Freitas, 2012).

Some of this is due to the nature of games. They are 'learning machines' (Gee, 2005). When first starting to play a game, players need to learn to play it. A

well-designed video game makes this process effective yet engaging. When looking at how this is done, it can be observed that these games incorporate the same notions and principles of learning as found in contemporary cognitive science research. These include giving information 'just in time' when the player needs it and thus always in appropriate context, they have a steady increase in challenge and difficulty, without ever being too frustrating that will drive players on to try again if needed. Ideally, the also provide the player with the opportunity to influence the game-world, giving them both a stake in it as well as an opportunity to apply what they have learnt when playing the game, or alternative a creative say through in-game editors or mods, that can also increase computational literacy, collaborative experience and design and media knowledge (Steinkuehler & Johnson, 2009). Good game design should also provide player with a good general grasp of the game components at the initial levels of the game, that can then become more complex as the game progresses, thus creating a cycle of expertise in the long run (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1991). This also has to do with how motivational good games have to be in order for individuals to continue to play them, which is suggests has also to do with how invested a player becomes with the game. Finally, especially in a multi-player setting, players have to work together with others, creating not only social connections in the process, but also creating cross-functional knowledge in the gaming setting (Gee, 2003).

In addition to cognitive science, video games have also been shown to work well and fit into several theories and approaches from education studies, including Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction among others, featuring elements of verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, motor skills and the development of attitudes related to personal choice (Becker, 2007). Applying and checking for a number of educational theories to games can thus concurrently also become a way to check on their quality of tools for learning (Becker, 2009). Furthermore, games have been recognised as places of social learning through the lens of cultural studies (John Banks & Potts, 2010).

In addition to these theoretical and academic led reasons why video games have increasingly become subjects of interest for educational purposes, there is also the practical consideration of how to reach children and young people. Gaming was already a daily activity for most teens about 10 years ago (Lenhart et al., 2008), and with the ongoing growth and availability of digital games on different platform this trend is unlikely to change any time soon (R. E. Ferdig, 2014).

When discussing games for learning and education, it is also important to distinguish between (commercial) games made for entertainment purposes and those made with education in mind as well as what are referred to as 'serious games'. The main differentiation between these two is that the latter are supposed to be useful for one purpose or another, e.g. exercise or social impact, other than entertainment (Girard et al., 2013).

A game's effectiveness as an educational tool does however not automatically stem from the initial purpose for which it is made. A meta-analysis (Young et al., 2012) in the area suggests that it very much depends on the content area the game is implemented in as well as how they are incorporated into teaching in general. It is thus equally a question of 'what does this game teach' as well as 'are these the right conditions for this game to be used?'. Successful cases of incorporating commercial games into classroom teaching include, among others, using *Civilization* to teach about world politics and history (J. K. Lee & Probert, 2010; Weir & Baranowski, 2011) as well as *Minecraft* in fields such as architecture or ecology among others (Ekaputra et al., 2013; Nebel et al., 2016; Valls et al., 2016).

There are various approaches to categorise and model the process of learning through games. Among these are models that focus on how motivation, gaming and learning interplay and how it can be expressed in game design. Either through an input-process-output approach (Garris et al., 2002) or by focusing on motivational design, as e.g. found in Keller's SRCO Model of Motivational Design with it four components of attention strategies, relevance strategies, confidence strategies and satisfaction strategies (Keller,

1987; Paras, 2005). Others promote the concurrent use of a variety of frameworks focusing on different factors such as gender, development level and socioemotional factors to have more holistic overall view on a game's potential and challenges (Kafai & Burke, 2015; Plass et al., 2015; Subrahmanyam & Renukarya, 2015; Tettegah et al., 2015).

2.2.3. Game design and tools

What is game design and how can we talk about it?

"Game design is narrowly defined as the creation of the interactive elements of a game, the rules sets, the gameplay dynamics and systems that run the input-output loop of any game experience" (Rouse III, 2014, p.83). In a way it is what bring and binds all the other elements, narrative, visuals or audio effects together. An alternative way of describing it, supposedly by *Civilization* designer Sid Meier, would be as a combination of 'interesting decisions' (Rouse III, 2010, p.27) that a player encounters through playing a game. These decisions should be neither too easy nor too overwhelming, thus keeping the player engaged and interested. A more structured approach to talk about game design, for both designers and academics alike, is offered through the Mechanics/Dynamics/Aesthetic (MDA) framework (Hunicke et al., 2004). When using this framework, a game is first considered through its very basic rules, the mechanics, these lead to different dynamics when playing that finally cause an aesthetic or emotional response evoked in the player when engaging into a game (see figure 7). Through this way, developers can check whether the implemented mechanics and other design decision cause the anticipated reaction in the players (Walk, et al., 2017).

```
        Rules                    System                     'Fun'

     Mechanics      ──▶       Dynamics       ──▶      Aesthetics

  Game components,          How mechanics react        Emotion responses
  data representation,      on player in-put and        from the player
  algorithms                the output following
                            from it
```
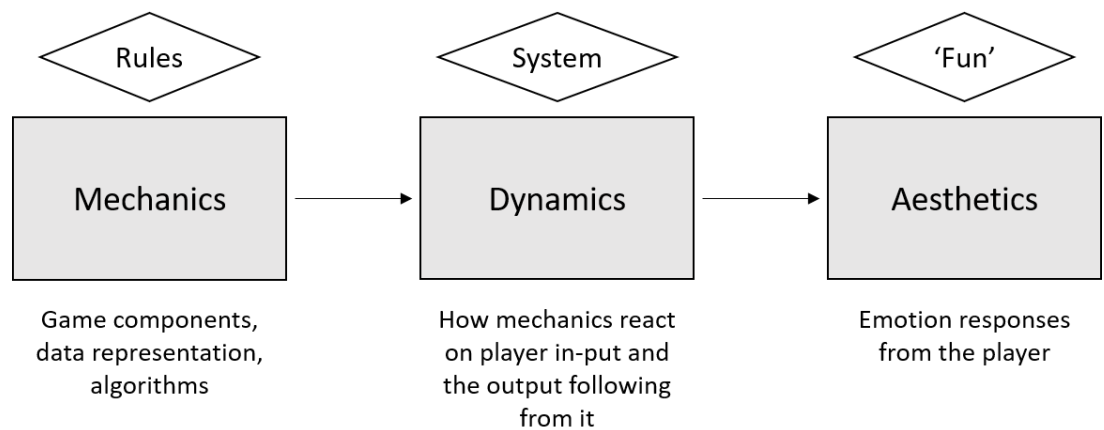
Figure 7 The MDA approach to game design (adopted from Hunicke, LeBlac, & Zubek, 2004)

Classifying and categorising games

Given the diversity between not only different genres, but also individual games, various efforts and suggestions have been brought forward to categorise and systemise games and the design idea behind them (Salen Tekinbas & Zimmerman, 2003). In general, the more niche each categorisation approach is, the more detailed and specific it will be. Apart from general classifications (Aarseth et al., 2003; Buruk & Özcan, 2018; Dahlskog et al., 2009; Elverdam & Aarseth, 2007), some examples include a taxonomy for classifying games in general, based on their differences in actors, rules and resources (Klabbers, 2003), a framework focusing on ontology (Zagal et al., 2005), a taxonomy on (serious) games for different kinds of rehabilitation (Rego et al., 2010) as well a taxonomy for business games and simulations, including definitions and characteristics (Greco et al., 2013). As visible from these few examples, few areas of gaming have not yet at least superciliously been surveyed.

But it is just not games, but also behaviour associated with them and their players (Hanna et al., 2014) have been discussed and categorised. These includes things such as cheating (Yan & Randell, 2005) and general motivations when playing and how this can effect game design (Canossa et

al., 2013; Schuurman et al., 2008; Tychsen et al., 2008; Yee, 2006). Finally, being informed by both game studies and educational theories, Bouvier, Lavoue and Sehaba (2014) produced a categorization and definition of digital game engagement types and states. Their work resulted in finding four distinct engagement types: environmental, social, self and action.

Interestingly enough, there was yet to be a categorisation or taxonomy on politics in games to be made, prior to the work presented in this thesis.

Game design with specific values in mind

Designing and developing games that incorporate or include particular values has become an academically led approach to game design in the last decade. This development is concurrent with the below mentioned discussion on (underlying) ideologies in games.

While Flanagan is probably the most well-known author in this area, she is by far not the only contributor. All of the work related to this is generally interested in discovering values built into game and develop methods and approaches to design games with values in mind or to express them in particular ways (Barr et al., 2007; Flanagan et al., 2007; Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014). Some of this work is also inspired and informed by efforts made to link game design with real-world acitivism, by working with activists, which also led to developing approaches for value-based games for activism (Flanagan, n.d., 2006; Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2007).

Cards as design tools

Using (ideation) cards as design tools has seen a growing popularity in the last two decades, although their initial use dates back into the 1950s and 1960s (Kwiatkowska et al., 2014; Lucero et al., 2016; Roy & Warren, 2018). Cards as design tools have been used in various areas and for different tasks, from designing mixed-reality games (Wetzel et al., 2017) to considering legal issues

in design (Luger et al., 2015). They are thus not only assessible due not being technology dependent in their use, but also flexible in the way and the area they are used for. Their two main use areas are however either analytical tasks, e.g. when looking at existing designs and technology, or generative tasks, such as designing new applications or game prototypes. Most recently, new approaches to using and comparing designs made with ideation cards have been introduced. One of these is *Cardmapper,* a tool supporting comparison and reflection on designs made with ideation cards through a joint database of all designs that produces visualisations of card and design relationships (Darzentas et al., 2019).

2.2.4. Politics and games

The academic debate on games and politics has not grown in comparative measures to the one on politics in other types of media or the general effect of technology on political behaviour. While some voices, especially in the public, still doubt whether there is any politics in games or if games are political, others see very much the influence of developers on the game they create, making games a 'designed experience' (Squire, 2006) as a way games can be indirectly political. This also echoes in the work done on values in games discussed above (Barr et al., 2007) or how games can help to drive socio-technical innovation (Isbister et al., 2018). An alternative way to consider this is also the idea of the ethics of computer games, seeing games as ethical objects and experiences (Sicart, 2009). One game where this can observed is 'Papers, Please' (Pope, 2013), a game that puts the player in the position of an immigration officer in a fictional dystopian Soviet inspired country, which has been shown to be a good example for moral engaging game design (Formosa et al., 2016).

Games for 'political learning'

One way games and politics have been discussed is through the issue of how games can be used to help learning about both political and civil values, though in most discussions the focus is more on civic ideas rather than understanding political institutions.

Some examples of these is work that introduces a game/life simulation focusing on civil values used in high school social studies classes. Students interacting with the simulation have shown greater awareness and willingness to engage in civic activities. It is suggested that games like these have the potential to reduce the gap in interest and knowledge on politics (and civics) between students of different performance levels and with varying degrees of access to political information (Bachen et al., 2015)

Games have also been found to likewise increase engagement of students in certain civil activities such as helping and guiding others, learning about problems in society, exploring social, moral and ethical issues, organising groups and taking part in decisions about how communities should be run. However, at least until a few years ago, there was not yet any commercially available game that successfully completely linked digital gaming activities with real-life civic behaviour. It is further suggested we consider the social context of playing games when considering games' potential for engagement as well as design aspects in the games themselves (Umaschi Bers, 2010) Other ways of how games can be used to promote political engagement have been considered through using (semi-)serious games, which are thus built for this specific purpose rather than (purely) entertainment. Neys and Jansz (2010) considered both the designer's intentions and the effect on players of some of these games. Through interviewing several game designers they identified four main aims behind creating games with political content. These were to provide a way of informing players about a certain issue that was addressed in a game; a way to create awareness and potentially persuade players; ways to make players want to become engaged and show them how this can be done as well as finally seeing the games as a form of expression.

Looking at the effect playing such game can have on players, it was observed that not only did they take in the information provided and formed their opinion around in, but it was also found that about half of participants also took action after playing the game. The games also acted as a social facilitator as participants wanted to talk about the experiences and information in the game with others.

The literature also features and discusses games designed, in this case 'Community PlantIt', with a specific engagement focus: creating trust and bringing individuals in communities together in the city of Detroit as the foundation of further engagement and civic learning (Gordon & Baldwin-Philippi, 2014).

But simply creating trust in government by playing a game is not that straightforward as other studies have shown (Barthel, 2013). The game 'President for a Day' put players in the position of the president of the US trying to get the budget through congress. While players' attitudes towards governments wasting money changes, it did not improve overall political trust, suggesting that change through games is possible, but needs to be done in a targeted way.

Games have been used as a way to allow players a better insight and understanding in a political situation, e.g. the situation of asylum seekers, through living through their experience in the game. Players seem to understand that while the game is still a product of fiction, their gaming experience is nevertheless reflective of the experiences asylum seekers have (Nash, 2015)

Other writers have suggested that games can be similar to documentaries. This can happen through documenting historic events, while also re-enacting them as a way to raise awareness, e.g. the association of J.F. Kennedy in *JRK Reloaded* (Raessens, 2006). This opens up the question of when something is a game or interactive documentary and where one ends and the other starts. The same is true for how truthful events presented in games are depicted or

whether history is modified in order for better dramatic and narrative flow, as sometimes the case with film. Finally, one has to ask when and how is it appropriate to have games depicting traumatic events such as '9/11' or the Columbine High School shooting and to make others relive those events for entertainment purposes (Bogost & Poremba, 2008; D. Galloway et al., 2007).

Ideology in games

Related to Squire's (2006) notion of games as designed experience that are influenced by their creators' background and beliefs as well as the discussion on values in games, is also the question in how far games can be ideological. The two dominant arguments in this discussion are that either games are ideological due to the people making them, the system in which this happens and through design choices as well as the notion that games only ever can represent a tiny fraction of the world, that cannot easily be objective (Bogost, 2006a, 2006b; Dyer-Witheford & Peuter, 2009; Frasca, 2013; Kinder, 1991; Provenzo Jr., 1991; W. Wright & Bogost, 2007) or alternatively, that the structure and architecture of computers and the (militaristic) environment in which they developed undermine any major influences by the designers and developers. The latter point thus also argues that computers and technology are not 'neutral' by themselves, but have their own 'ideology' and ways of acting and thinking built into them (Crogan, 2011; A. Galloway, 2006).

Among popular commercial video games that were analysed and critiqued for their in-built ideology, the *Civilization* series (Firaxis Games, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2016; MicroProse, 1991, 1996) has probably been the most numerously cited and considered. Analyses of *Civilization* games included issues such as oversimplifying the process of colonization to winners and losers as well as its portrayal of less developed, indigenous tribes as 'barbarians' (Douglas, 2002; Friedman, 1999) as well as having an ethnocentric-view on non-industrialised or non-Western cultures and the way they are depicted (A. Galloway, 2006; Märyä, 2008). This is accompanied by "a bias towards representing all of

history an inevitable and constant scientific advancement and social progressivism" (Peterson, Miller, & Fedorko, 2013, p.44).

A second game popular among game studies scholars, not just for analysing its underlying ideology, but mostly due to its high regular player count, is *World of Warcraft*, a massively multiplayer online game by Blizzard Entertainment (2004). The game through its design, it is argued, by Rettberg (2008) re-encores a corporate and capitalist ideology and work ethic, focusing on resource acquisition, trading and self-improvement. Others find the depiction of the different alliances or factions in-game troubling, featuring real-life existing but simplified and appropriated cultures that lead to a 'familiar and foreign' division between the two opposing groups (Langer, 2008).

Apart from the above-mentioned points, there is however comparatively little discussion on politics found in games made for pre-dominantly entertainment purposes in the literature. Considering how TV or film content can influence people's attitude towards politics, it seems surprising that not more research has so far been done on this applies for mainstream video games, especially given the latter's higher level of interactivity, which can make for strengthened experience of content and context and an altogether stronger feeling of being in control, thus simulating self- and political efficacy, a concept deemed very important for developing political engagement and the overall performance of the above mentioned 'political self' (Clarke & Acock, 1989; Craig et al., 1990; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Niemi et al., 1991). Overall it is however agreed, that ideology in games is more often a side-product of cultural inheritance and technological precedent, including the game engines used for developing a game, than conscious decisions by the developer, at least for bigger commercial games (Hayes, 2014).

In general, games and the way politics are displayed in them have been shown to change attitudes in players. One example for this is *Defcon*, a nuclear warfare simulation, that has been used to change players' attitudes toward nuclear weapons (Waddington et al., 2013). Concurrently, politics can also have an influence on the cultural experience of commercial games, as e.g. an analysis of the potential for political reflection and elements of political philosophy in a Star Wars themed MMO game shows (Geraci & Recine, 2014).

The tabletop and politics

Finally, it should be remembered that not all designed games are necessarily digital. Tabletop or board games have seen a resurgence of interest and sales in the last couple of years (Jolin, 2016; Stegmaier, 2019; M. Wright, 2019). In the field of game studies, this has led to the development of the sub-section of 'analogue game studies', as a reaction to general game studies being too focused on digital or computer games alone (Trammell et al., 2014).

In regards to 'politics' and board games there is a slight gap between what kind of games are available and what is discussed in the academic literature. There are initial efforts in discussing socio-economic and ideological themes in board games, e.g. articles on gender and racial representation in board games and the industry in general (Pobuda, 2018; Robinson, 2014) as well as critical discussions of capitalism as an underlying ideology in many board games (J. R. Lee, 2017). Tangential to the area of politics is also the discussion and review of accessibility of games on academics-led web projects such as 'Meeples Like Us' (*Meeple Like Us*, 2019), that also considers socioeconomic accessibility and representation.

Discussion of institutional aspects of politics in board games is however comparatively small. Most of the time these discussions only focus on war and military aspects, particularly as found in war games (Alonge, 2019), and are often framed or looked at through the lens of history rather than political

science (see Clio's Board Games, 2018 for an academically informed overview on different periods as represented in board games). Board games focusing on simulating or emulating aspect of institutional politics and the parliamentary process nevertheless exist, even though they have not found their way into the overall academic debate yet. Their scope ranges from big and detailed representation of the electoral process of federal state elections in Germany in *Die Macher* (Schmiel, 1986); negotiation focused takes on the way the UN Security Council makes decisions in *Article 27: The UN Security Council Game* (Baden, 2012) or a colourful, non-threatening take on the matter that also tries to educate the player in the game such as *Zoocracy* (Hass, 2019).

With this overview over the different areas of interest and their state of the art completed, it is now time to return to the original research questions and interest of this doctoral research.

3. Political games, political gamers? Exploring the relationship and perception between players and games

3.1. Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, the core interest of my research was originally to further investigate the use and role of politics in video games and how games could be used to create and improve political engagement.

In order to better understand the effects of playing political games or games with politics in them however, the first step of locating politics in games needs to be done.

As the literature review found, there is so far no universally agreed on approach to discussing politics in games. Furthermore, most literature discussing games for political and historical learning and participation (Neys & Jansz, 2010; Squire & Barab, 2004; Waddington et al., 2013; Weir & Baranowski, 2011) focused on one particular game.

In order to fully understand where any effects in games might have come from and in what context this happens, it was decided to initially capture the 'landscape' in which this happens and learn how politics in games is perceived by its potential audience, the game players.

3.2. Political games, political gamers? A landscaping study

In order to gain a better understanding of the context of politics in games and political games, it was decided to design and carry out a landscaping study.

The design of the study was led and influenced by a number of motivations, goals and research questions.

The main idea and motivation behind the study was to further explore the 'political games' space and games with political content in order to gain a

better understanding of the matter and current situation for future studies and general research strategies for my doctoral work.

Therefore, it was of interest what was associated with 'political games' by players as well as how politics in games are perceived by them. Would certain fields of politics be more dominant? Are certain games more associated with politics than others? Would this association be purely based on what is openly visible or would players be aware of underlying ideologies and world view?

In addition, the people playing political games or games with politics in them were of interest. This interest was two-fold. On the one hand there is the question of whether these players are drastically different from other players, e.g. in regards to the way they play and what attitudes they have and general gaming habits. As part of this, motivations to play, goals and playing styles were of interest. While the general game studies literature has had a lot of output in regards to motivation (Schuurman et al., 2008; Tychsen et al., 2008; Yee, 2006) and 'gamer types' (Poels et al., 2012; Scharkow et al., 2015) over the years, there is as yet no indication whether this would hold true and could be replicated for particularly 'political' games as well. The study would thus be an opportunity to test for this. One the other hand, it was also of interest who the players are beside being gamers of specific games. Therefore basic demographic information, such as age and education were of interest, as well as their general interest attitude and interest towards politics and if and how they would be political active and engaged.

The latter was also of interest for the third field of interest and exploration for this study. It was hoped that through learning more about the people playing political games, the way they play and why as well as how political they are in their everyday life, a better understanding of the relationship between playing political games and being political, both in regards to being interested and engaging in associated activities.

3.3. Methodology

The landscaping study was conducted through an online study, that explored participants' gaming habits and experience with a variety of political games or games that had political content, while also considering their political behaviour and perception of what is political in games.

Participants were recruited through various social media and online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and gaming related message boards. The only requirements for participation was to above the age of 18 and having some experience, i.e. having played at least once, any of the number of games discussed in survey. Please see below for a more detailed discussion on the individual games.

The existing literature on politics in games usually focuses either on smaller, independent titles that are often browser based (Neys & Jansz, 2010; Waddington et al., 2013) or on a single strategy games like Civilization (Squire, 2006; Squire & Barab, 2004; Weir & Baranowski, 2011). These decisions thus excluded a larger number on participants, which may play games, but not the single game in question. In order to maximise the group of people that could potentially participate in the study, it was decided to significantly extent the number and kind of games included. Due to the existing literature on Civilization to back up, build up and compare with, it was decided to focus on other strategy games as part of the study as well as one particularly political game and one game that was free to nominate by participants. The criteria for the other strategy games were that they were different enough from Civilization to make interesting and comparative observations. This included a difference in complexity – being both more or less complex, difference in settings as well as attitudes and approaches to politics or political content. In the end, six games based on these criteria were chosen. These games were:

Civilization, *Tropico*, *Galactic Civilizations*, *Democracy*, *Crusader Kings* and *Europa Universalis*, as well as the political game nominated by each participant.

Civilization (Firaxis Games, 2005) (see figure 8) was chosen because it offers an example of the 'bigger picture' view on a nation as well as having been already frequently discussed in the literature as already discussed, e.g. on its use for teaching about history and politics in the classroom.

Figure 8 Map view in Civilization

Tropico (Haemimont Games, 2011) (see figure 9) offers a more humoresque take on politics. The player takes on the role of 'El Presidente', a ruler of a tropical island, while also being an example for a micro-management approach to politics.

Figure 9 An example for an island city in Tropico

Galactic Civilizations (Stardock, 2006) (figure 10) was used as it takes politics into a sci-fi setting, showing the universal application of politics, not just in games.

Figure 10 Map view in Galactic Civilizations

Democracy (Positech Games, 2013) (figure 11) focuses on the policy side of the political process and how it affects citizens directly. Here the player becomes the ruling head of government of a state of their choice and tries to pass legislation according to their believes, while also trying to be re-elected at the end of their term.
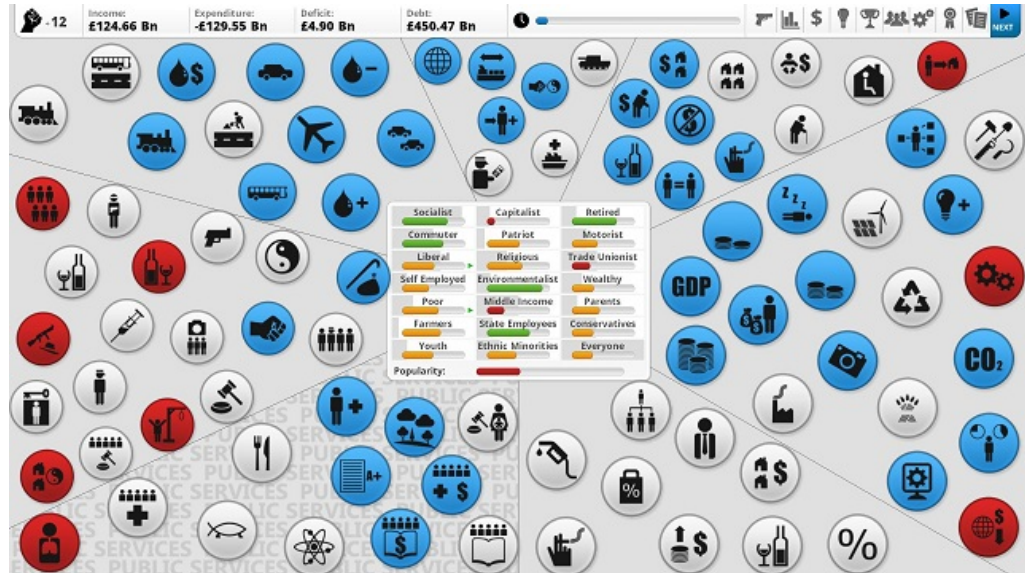
Figure 11 The policy overview screen in Democracy

Crusader Kings (Paradox Development Studio, 2012) (figure 12) and *Europa Universalis* (Paradox Development Studio, 2013) finally are both examples for 'politics in a historical setting', however in different eras and focuses.
Crusader Kings is set in Medieval Europe and focuses very much on dynasties, whereas *Europa Universalis* is set in the Renaissance age, including colonies in the 'New World' and emphasizing trade and negotiations over pure preservation of one's bloodline.

Figure 12 The dynasty overview in Crusader Kings

The 'other political game of choice' was incorporated not only to allow for other games to be considered, but also to explore what participants would consider political or as a game with politics in it.

The questionnaire was separated into three sections, firstly general demographic questions such as age range and gender, followed by questions on gaming experience and behaviour and finally some questions on politics. The gaming experience sections included questions on time spent playing the different games series plus one game of choice, motivations and goals when playing, a free text field asking the participant to describe their own playing style, preferred genres as well as whether they would consider any of the games they play 'political' and if so, which games these were. Furthermore, it was also asked whether they thought that the presentation of 'politics' in game was accurate and related to 'real life' politics. Answer options for motivation and goals were taken from findings in the literature, whereas the question on the connectedness of games and real politics was a novel contribution to the literature. The section on politics included questions of general subjective interest in politics, put on a 11 steps Likert quale, as most

other questions on subjective considerations in the questionnaire were; whether the participant had engaged in a list of political activities over the last 12 months, ranging from following the news, to voting, social media activities and standing for a public office. Finally, in order to get a better picture of the (political) values of participants, the study also included a sub-scale for ideology measuring participants on an authoritarian/libertarian continuum adopted from a scale developed with the British electorate in mind, but changed so that it was applicable to an international audience (Heath et al., 1994). Please see the thesis appendix for a copy of the complete questionnaire.

Being disseminated through social media and message boards, the survey was filled in by a total of 2,158 participants. 94% or 2028 of them were male, 5.1% or 109 were female, 15 (0.7%) described themselves to be 'other' and 6 (0.3%) did choose not to say. In regards to age, the vast majority of participants was below 35 years old, with 1562 (72.4%) between 18-24 years old and 517 (24%) in the age group between 25-34 years. 68 (3.2%) were between 34-44 years, 5 (0.2%) between 45-54 years, another five between 55-64 and one participant being above 65 years old.

Almost 60% (59.8%/1291) of participants were in full-time education, 29.9% were employees, 146 (6.8%) were unemployed, 65 (3%) were self-employed and 10 (0.5%) were in various caring positions. Seeing this high percentage of participants it is not surprising that the sample had generally a high level of education. 50% (1079) had at least A-level equivalent. An additional 33.8% (729) had a first university degree and yet another 227 (10.5%) even held a postgraduate degree. Furthermore, 3.2% (70) had graduated from a vocational school, 0.3% (47) had received a GCSE equivalent and finally 0.3% (6) had only received primary schooling.

3.4. Results

Note: all number reported in the following, have been rounded to two decimals when appropriate

Before further discussing the perception of politics in the games and the people who play them, it seems appropriate to first mention how popular the individual games were between participants, based on individuals having played them, and how much time they spent plying them in order to better appreciate any further results. This is also done with the research's goal to focus on (popular) commercial games rather than experiences explicitly made to range behaviour and attitudes.

From all the games in the survey, the Civilization series turned out to be the most popular. 2119 or 98.2% of all participants had at least played a game of Civilization once. Other games were only half as well-known with the second placed Europa Universalis being only known to 978 participants or 45.3% of the sample. The Crusader Kings and Tropico series were similarly often experienced, with 930 (43.1%) and 911 (42.2%) having played them before. Only about a quarter or less of the participants had experience with either Democracy (573, 26%) or the Galactic Civilizations series (457, 21.2%).

One feedback I received from participants in regards to this question was that their playing frequency was not particularly regular. They could spent weeks not touching a particular game only to start playing again one day and then spend many long hours on it. The frequency by which a game is played does thus not say anything about the intensity of play or length of individual gaming sessions when it is played.
Based purely on reported frequency, Civilization is played most often, with 49.8% of all players playing at least several times per week and more than two thirds playing weekly (69.9%). This is in stark contrast to Galactic Civilisations or Democracy. The first has a combined percentage of 80.1% only playing a few times per year or even only once. Democracy has a higher share

of monthly places, but still 67.4% of gamers only play on several occasions per year or have played only once. This is similar to the Tropico series, where 45.6% of all players play several times per year. Again, as per above, this does not say anything about the length of time spent playing each time. Far more spread out in regards to times played is the Crusader Kings series. While it has a similar share of monthly (23.7%) and occasional players (23.3%), overall 58.9% off all the players play at least monthly. Finally, the most balanced in regards to time spend playing is probably Europa Universalis. Here the biggest groups are those who play several time per week (19.7%), though lower frequencies all share between 15.0% for weekly and 17.7% for having played once.

3.4.1.   What is perceived as 'political game' or 'games with politics in them' by gamers?

Participants were asked whether any of the games they played could be considered 'political'. Interestingly enough, only 62.6% of participants (1351) said so, whereas 36.9% (797) said they thought not. This would also include the games in the survey, as having played at least one of them was a prerequisite to taking part in the survey.

In connection to this, participants were also asked how accurately they thought the games in the survey would represent 'real-life' politics. For this they could rate the games from 0 'No relationship / resemblance' to 10 'Very realistic resemblance / relationship' or choose to say 'don't know'.

Of the six pre-set game series in the survey Democracy (see table 1) was considered the most realistic with an average of 7.64. This was followed by Europa Universalis and Crusader Kings with 6.55 and 6.54 respectively. The most well-known among the games, Civilization, was rated 5.33, while Tropico received a mean of 5.09 by participants. Galactic Civilizations was considered

least realistic with an average of 4.00. Finally, participants considered their own choice an average of 4.62 in regards to accurate representation.

Game	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Civilization series	2110	5.33	2.469
Tropico series	891	5.09	2.398
Galactic Civilizations series	427	4.00	2.513
Democracy series	697	7.64	2.616
Crusader Kings series	942	6.54	2.517
Europa Universalis series	956	6.55	2.502
Other / Participant's choice	1097	4.62	3.107

Table 1 Representations of 'real life' politics in the games according to participants

When being asked to pick another game fitting for this survey on gaming experience and politics as well as played by them, participants chose a great variety of games, coming up with over a hundred different titles. Several games and game series were however mentioned more often than others, giving up an insight into which games participants perceived as particularly fitting and relevant to a survey on politics.

The most often mentioned individual game among the answers was *Victoria* (Paradox Development Studio, 2010)*,* with 182 participants choosing it. Considering game series as whole, *Total War* (Creative Assembly, 2000) was mentioned most often with 192 mentions. The other game choices each hat considerable fewer mentions. The following 8 choices were League of Legends 76), the Dota series (52), Cities Skyline (51), the Age of Empires series (50) , Endless Legends (48), Heart of Iron series (41) and The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim and the XCOM series with 40 each (see table 2).

Game Title	Number of mentions
Victoria	182
Total Wars series	192

League of Legends	76
Dota series	52
Cities Skyline	51
Age of Empires series	50
Endless Legend	48
Heart of Iron series	41
The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim	40
XCOM series	40

Table 2 Most often selected game (series) for participants 'other' choice

When being asked to give any examples for 'political' games they might be playing, participants again gave a, not least due to the open ended, qualitative nature of the question, variety of answers.

On one side, many participants referred back to the games mentioned in the survey and other parts of the game series and what is particularly political about them.

> "Yes, in that some have politics in them. Some, like Tropico, play up certain stereotypes that we have about certain government types. Others, such as Democracy attempt to simulate politics. And then some such as Victoria simply make politics a set of variables to manipulate in order to access certain game mechanics."

Having political knowledge was also deemed to make a difference to the overall playing experience of the games.

> "Civilization for obvious reasons. Many RPGs and shooters include political plotlines. Some are more realistic than others, but the average quality is low. I prefer Civilization because it gives greater agency, and I feel (whether it's true or not) that my historical and political knowledge is relevant to the game."

The notion of shooters being political for various reasons was shared by various participants.

"Not Civilization, but other games such as the Call of Duty franchise tend to have a rather political tendency."

"I believe most of the WW2 shooters are somewhat political in that they are trying to affect your beliefs by portraying Germans as the devils."

"I play an adventure-RPG game called Dishonored. You are assassinating leaders of military, religious, and political factions. The game has deep backstory and political themes. Spec-Ops: The Line is about America's involvement in a fictional conflict in Dubai where it highlights corruption, the trauma to civilian populations, and trauma to soldiers. Obviously referencing America's past involvement in conflicts."

Some located 'politics' more game genre specific, particularly in strategy games, as well as game mechanics.

"Most strategy games contain some element of politics; inter-state, inter-personal, or within polity-like entities. Generally abstracted to suit game mechanics rather than an accurate representation."

"Sometimes they can be a loose simulation of real political dynamics. "Fun" game mechanics can sometimes conflict with realism, and in general these games lean towards better game mechanics, but I find that I enjoy them more when they both make sense with the game and represent real political scenarios."

There were furthermore individuals who point towards the intrinsic political nature and potential bias of some games.

"Nearly all games, are either set in or revolve around Western (mainly American) cultures' interpretation of the rest of the world or Western nations are also somewhat favored when it comes to creating a protagonist for a game. "

> "Nearly all games I play have pro-western themes. It's just part of American culture."

> "All games have a political point of view of the creators."

Finally, the notion of multiplayer experiences being more political than single player gaming was also raided.

> "Any strategy game where I have to deal with human opponents, i.e. civilization multiplayer."

> "I play EDH in magic the gathering. When there are 4 (or sometimes more) players in the game, actions can be heavily swayed by the needs/demands of other players. Having the weight of other people's goals in the game weigh on your decisions [and] definitely makes it feel like there is a political aspect to the game."

> "Civ 5 has a somewhat limited diplomacy system in singleplayer. Multiplayer is more interesting because you can more directly engage the other leaders. In a current game I am playing with my friends online, I am at war with a foreign power because he has a government based in socialism, while mine is capitalist. I have a nearby ally who is much weaker than myself but who has also chosen capitalism through his relationship with me: one of the world powers. I consider him a bit of a third world country and could easily wipe him off the map, but instead we have a shared alliance bolstered by common political ideology. I am even providing him humanitarian aid in the form of funding, technological advancement, and free luxury goods. I will also defend him militarily if necessary"

3.4.2. Players of political game

The general demographics mentioned above, especially the much higher percentage of male participants, should be kept in mind when looking at the overall results of the study. The difference between participation between the genders is not least likely due to the way participants were recruited, as special interest gaming groups, such as the ones on Reddit caused particular strong uptakes on participation, tend to have an overall male bias in their user groups.

In addition to demographics, participants were also asked about their motivation when playing the games in the survey, their goals and how they would describe their playing style. This, among other things, was to be able to compare their gaming behaviour and habits with gamer types found in the literature.

Motivation

The most domineering motivation for most participants to play the games was that they are fun (N=2045, 94.8%). This was followed with a large margin by being able to do whatever the player wants to do (1222, 56.6%) and the overall content (1216, 56.3%). Eventually mastering the game (1102, 51%) and overcoming challenges (1088, 50.4%) as well as immersion (1079, 50%) were other popular motivations. Interestingly concepts such as 'success' (701, 32.5%) and 'competition' (639, 29.6%) were comparatively less prevalent among participants.

Motivation (choose any applicable)	Frequency	Percentage
Fun	2045	94.4
'I can do whatever I want to do (within the game's limits)	1222	56.6
Overall content	1216	56.3

Eventually 'mastering' the game and/or skills involved in it	1102	51.1
Overcoming challenges	1088	50.4
Immersion and presence felt	1079	50.0
Exploration	987	45.7
Experimentation	983	45.6
Setting	960	44.5
Story or characters	769	35.6
I can play with others	755	35.0
Success	701	32.5
Emotions provoked by the game	679	31.5
Competition	639	29.6
Completion	451	20.9
I have nothing else to do	391	18.1
Other	46	2.1

Table 3 Motivation for playing, sorted by popularity

Personal goals

Similar to motivations, having fun and enjoying a game was also the most important personal goal when playing for most participants (1910, 88.5%). Similarly to mastering a game or overcoming challenges, working out a strategy was the second most frequently named goal among our sample (1445, 67.0%). Contrary the notion of 'success' being less important above however, participants did see 'winning' as important personal goal (1230, 57.0%). This does however not translate to reaching a particular score (195, 9.0%). Achieving the game's official goal was furthermore only important to slightly more than half the participant (1123, 52.0%) and domination (924, 42.8%) was more popular a notion than pure survival (706, 32.7%).

Personal goal (choose any applicable)	Frequency	Percent
Fun and enjoyment	1910	88.5

Working out a strategy	1445	67.0
Winning	1230	57.0
Experimentation	1177	54.5
Achieving the goal provided by the game	1123	52.0
Domination	924	42.8
Survival	706	32.7
Completion	669	31.0
Particular score	195	9.0
Other	104	4.8

Table 4 Personal goals when playing, by popularity/frequency

Game genre preferences

The most popular genre among survey participants is strategy, which came
with an average score of 10.5 on a scale from 1 'would not play at all' to 11
'would very likely play' (see table 5). The second most popular genre was role
play games (RPGs) with a mean of 8.63. Other more likely genres played by
participants are Adventure (7.72), Simulations (7.68), Action (7.23) and
Shooters (7.19). Least likely to be played were titles from more niche genres
such as Music games (3.52) and Horror (3.47).

Game Genre	Mean
Strategy	10.05
Roll Play Game (RPG)	8.63
Adventure	7.72
Simulation	7.68
Action	7.23
Shooter	7.19
Puzzle	5.64
Card games	5.44
Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO)	4.94

Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA)	4.62
Racing	4.45
Fighting	4.35
Sports	4.12
Music	3.52
Horror	3.47

Table 5 Game genres preferences of participants

Play style

Participants were asked to individually describe their perceived play style, making a quantified description not straightforward.

In general, based on a qualitative analysis of responses, there seem to be two big player groups, those classifying themselves as aggressive and those more defensive or passive, there seemed surprisingly comparatively little in between these two extremes. An individual player may nevertheless have different playing behaviours depending on the situation and scenario. Some participants for example mentioned the difference between playing by themselves contrary to playing with friends, as already alluded to above. Furthermore, historical role playing seemed to be game play scenario which quite a few seemed to enjoy, suggesting at least a minimum level of historical knowledge among players. The historical accuracy of the role play scenarios seems to range from strict accuracy

> "Try to be historically accurate and to make sure that all cultures and kingdoms that should exist in a certain time do exist."

to experimental 'what if' scenarios

> "Primarily focused on roleplay and/or the absurdist historical diversions rather than on the gameplay. The situation that could possibly lead to Bohemia staking a claim to the steppes and expanding to Siberia interests me a great deal more than the idea-groups they

took. The idea of playing a campaign purely for world-conquest is inherently uninteresting to me, for example, because it necessarily precludes any semblance of historical possibility in favor of abuse of, in my opinion, somewhat lacking game mechanics (both in enjoyment and in accurate modelling)."

"I like to create narratives through the game. My imagination creates stories and the game is my notebook. (when dealing with grand strategy anyway."

Political attitudes and behaviour

When asked about their interest in politics on a scale from 1 'not all interested' to 11 'very much interested in politics', participants had a mean score of 7.84.

In regards to their engagement in politics, 96% (2071) of participants said that they would engage in some form of politics. This number however also includes a high number of individuals simply following the news and current affairs, as only 50.8% (1097) report that they do political things beyond keeping up to date with it. Other popular political activities were voting in local and national elections and signing petitions (see table 6).

Political activity (tick any applicable)	Number of participants engaging into activity
Reading about current affairs	1740
Talking about political issues with friends or family members	1617
Voting in local elections	1209
Signing a petition	1080
Voting in national elections	1078
Writing political comments on social media	832
Sharing political content on social media	732

Contacting your local MP or representative	448
Taking part in a consumer boycott	444
Donation to a campaign or cause	379
Party membership	338
Attending a protest or demonstration	314
Being active in a student or trade union	216
Volunteering in a local or national campaign	170
Organising any kind of offline political activity	160
Going to local council meetings	125
Organising any kind of online political activity	114
No, I don't follow any aspect of politics and I am not engaged in any political activity	106
Other	65
Running for or holding a public office	22

Table 6 Political activities and engagement of participants

Education plays a role in political engagement among participants.

As such, there is a difference between groups in education and political interest – as an ANOVA analysis between different educational shows (see table 7), does more education lead to greater interest in politics (F=2.355, p=0.038) (table 8).

Highest achieved level of education	N	Mean (of political Interest)	SD	Std. Error
Primary School	6	7.5	2.95	1.20
Secondary or Middle School (UK: GCSE)	47	7.51	2.83	0.41
High School (UK: A-Levels)	1079	7.71	2.58	0.08
Vocational School	70	7.53	2.45	0.29
Undergraduate degree	729	7.99	2.42	0.09

Postgraduate degree	227	8.18	2.48	0.16
Total	2158	7.84	2.52	0.05

Table 7 Mean of political interest of participants based on their education level

	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.
Between Groups	74.822	5	14.96	2.355	0.048
Within Groups	13672.12	2152	6.35		
Total	13747.234	2157			

Table 8 One-way ANOVA on difference in political interest between education groups

More education also leads to higher levels of political engagement (table 9), as again a comparison between the differences in means between different educational groups through an ANOVA shows (table 10) (F=3.567, p=0.003).

Highest achieved education level	N	Mean (of being political engaged)	SD	Std. Error
Primary School	6	0.83	0.41	0.17
Secondary or Middle School (UK: GCSE)	47	0.91	0.28	0.04
High School (UK: A-Levels)	1079	0.95	0.23	0.01
Vocational School	70	0.99	0.12	0.01
Undergraduate degree	729	0.98	0.16	0.01
Postgraduate degree	227	0.98	0.15	0.01
Total	2158	0.97	0.20	0.004

Table 9 Mean of being politically engaged of participants based on their education level

	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.686	5	0.137	3.567	0.003
Within Groups	82.806	2152	0.038		
Total	83.493	2157			

Table 10 One-way ANOVA on difference in political engagement between education groups

There is also a significant difference between educational groups when considering 'more than just watching the news' engagement (table 12, F=19.101, *p*=<0.0000). Participants with university degrees being particularly likely to do so (table 11).

Highest achieved education level	N	Mean (of being political engaged)	SD	Std. Error
Primary School	6	0.33	0.52	0.21
Secondary or Middle School (UK: GCSE)	47	0.38	0.49	0.07
High School (UK: A-Levels)	1079	0.41	0.49	0.02
Vocational School	70	0.5	0.50361	0.06
Undergraduate degree	729	0.62	0.48468	0.02
Postgraduate degree	227	0.62	0.48726	0.32
Total	2158	0.51	0.50005	0.11

Table 11 Mean of being politically engaged of participants (discounting following the news and current affairs) based on their education level

	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.
Between Groups	22.918	5	4.58	19.10	*p*=<0.0000
Within Groups	516.431	2152	0.25		
Total	539.350	2157			

Table 12 One-way ANOVA on difference in political engagement (discounting following the new and current affairs) between education groups

Participants' result from the ideology sub-scale included in the survey showed that participants are overall more liberal. The ideology measure involved seven questions, each on a five-point scale from 1, strongly authoritarian to 5, strongly liberal. There were originally developed by Heath, Evans and Martin (1993) as part of their measurement tool for core beliefs and values. When summed up participants have an average score of 28.6687 out of the possible 7 to 35 or alternatively 4.0955 out of 1 to 5.

3.4.3. What can be learn about the relationship between 'political games' and the people that play them?

While it is good to know that the participants in the study were generally interested in politics, it is the role and effect video games might have in this that is of particular interest. For this end, the relationship between those participants self-selecting as playing political games previously, 62.5% of the overall sample, to overall political interest and engagement vis-a-vis those who do not play was investigated.

When considering interest in politics in general, a positive medium-strength correlation of r=0.2*45* (*p*<=0.000) was found.

In addition, there was a significant difference in the interested-in-politics rating between participants playing political games habitually and those who do not (table 14). Those who did scored in average 8.3153, while the means for those not was 7.084 (table 13).

Participant group	N	Mean (of political Interest)	SD	Std. Error
No political games	807	7.04	2.65	.093
Plays political games	1351	8.32	2.32	.063
Total	2158	7.84	2.52	.054

Table 13 Means for interest in politics between participant groups

Participant Groups	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.
Between Groups	823.752	1	823.75	137.425	<=0.000
Within Groups	12923.482	2156	5.99		
Total	13747.234	2157			

Table 14 One-way ANOVA for political interest between players of political games and those who do not play them

When considering political engagement, it can be observed that not playing 'political games' does not mean that these participants will not engage into

politics in various ways (table 15). When considering averages however (table 16), there is a significant difference between players and non-players to be found (table 17).

Plays political games	No political engagement	Some form of political engagement	Total
No	53	754	807
Yes	34	1317	1351
Total	87	2071	2158

Table 15 Crosstab overview for political engagement vs. playing political games

Player Groups	N	Mean (of political engagement)	SD	Std. Error
No political games	807	0.94	0.25	0.00873
Plays political games	1351	0.97	0.16	0.00426
Total	2158	0.96	0.20	0.00424

Table 16 Means of political engagement between participant groups

Player Groups	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.839	1	0.829	21.62	<=0.000
Within Groups	82.664	2156	0.038		
Total	83.493	2157			

Table 17 One-way ANOVA for political engagement between participant groups

The same holds true when only considering more 'active' way of engaging, i.e. disregarding those participants only following the news or current affairs. While there are participants of any of the four possible crosstab constellations (table 18), there is a difference in the mean (table 19) between participants playing political games and those who do not, as is proven why a one-way ANOVA (F=4.656, p=0.031) (table 20).

Plays political games	No 'active' engagement	'Active' forms of political engagement	Total
No	421	386	807
Yes	650	711	1351
Total	1061	1097	2158

Table 18 Crosstab overview for active political engagement vs. playing political games

Player Groups	N	Mean (of 'active' political engagement)	SD	Std. Error
No political games	807	0.48	0.50	0.02
Plays political games	1351	0.53	0.50	0.01
Total	2158	0.51	0.50	0.01

Table 19 Means of active political engagement between participant groups

Player Groups	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.162	1	1.16	4.656	0.03
Within Groups	538.188	2156	0.25		
Total	539.350	2157			

Table 20 17 One-way ANOVA for active political engagement between participant groups

Based on these observations, it was decided to test for individual games as well as for the frequency of playing a game, in order to determine whether certain games would be more likely to be associated with political interest, active and general political engagement as well as generally playing political games from the participants perspective.

For an overview of the results please see table 21. For the individual calculations and their tables, please see the thesis appendix.

Game	Difference between players/non-players	Difference between regular, occasional and non-players	Differences between frequencies played, with everyone who ever played	Differences between frequencies played between participants playing more than once	Differences between everyone who ever played, with daily categories combined
Civilization	-	-	Pol. Games	-	-
Tropico	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage Pol. Engage.-no-news	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage	-	-	-
Galactic Civ.	-	-	-	-	-
Democracy	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage Pol. Engage.-no-news	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage	Pol. Interest Pol. Games	-	Pol. Interest Pol. Games
Crusader Kings	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage	Pol. Interest Pol. Games	Pol. Interest* Pol. Games* Pol. Engage
Europa Universalis	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage	Pol. Interest Pol. Games Pol. Engage	Pol. Interest	-	Pol. Interest

Table 21 Overview of significant results for differences in means between groups in regards to political interest, playing political games, being politically engaged and more 'actively' engaged

* holds true/significant if 'once' players are removed

Pol. Interest = Political interest

Pol. Games = says of themselves that they play political games

Pol. Engage = Political Engagement

Pol. Engage.-nonews = Political Engagement, not counting news consumption

(= 'active engagement')

Definition of 'player': everyone said to play an individual game at least

monthly. While it can be argued that this might not be often enough, it was

pointed out by several participants that they go through waves of increased gaming activity combined with times of no or little playing and thus were not sure which category to choose. Defining a monthly player as a 'regular' thus tries to cater for this possibility.

Definition of regular, occasional and non-players: Regular – up to monthly (see above), occasional – several time per year or has played the game once, non-players have never played a game in question.

As can be seen from the overview, there is quite a difference between games. *Galactic Civilizations* does not seem to make any difference in having played in regards to any of the indicator used. For the most popular games among the six, *Civilization*, it will only affect players perception of playing political games positively. *Tropico* shows differences between players and non-players, but the effect for political engagement beyond news consumption does not hold when differentiating between different frequencies of playing the game. *Democracy* similarly shows a difference between all indicators when considering players and non-players, as well as a difference in playing political games and being interested in politics when distinguishing between different frequencies of play. Playing *Crusader Kings* as well as *Europa Universalis* both show a difference in levels of general political engagement, interest in politics and playing political games, but not for more active forms of political engagement. *Crusader Kings* furthermore is the only game that shows a difference in interest in politics when comparing participants having played the game more than once and those who have not.

For interest in politics and political engagement, a significant difference in player groups meant that playing more often was associated with higher levels of interest and engagements contrary to those who played very little.

3.5. Discussion

3.5.1. Politics and Political Games

Based on participants' responses on examples of political games they play as well as their choices for additional games for the survey, an impression of what is associated with politics in games as well as what is a political game or game with politics in them.

The games most associated based on these are strategy games, spanning over a world map, similar to the games found in the survey. The most common political elements found in them are military or use of force as well as diplomacy as an alternative to the force, with some economic aspects to accompany it.

In addition, the games chosen and associated with 'political games' have a variety of characteristics. First, these can feature a variety of levels of complexity, both in general play, e.g. when comparing Crusaders Kings to Civilization, the former having a similar idea with more in-depth mechanisms associated with it, as well as in regards to political activities, e.g. the complexity of Democracy contrary to the lighter touches of Tropico. Similarly, some of the games mentioned were more openly political than others. League of Legends as well as Dota might not be as directly political, however were very popular games at the time of the survey. As such, the fact that these games are also featured in the response of what participants play is reassuring in so far as it shows that the sample population was aware of them and plays them, being thus closer to the 'average gamer' or consumer of the time.

Furthermore, a lot of them feature historic elements, such as Victoria which takes place in the period from 1832 to the 1920s and the Total War series, which is set in different era depending on the part of the series.

Political games are however not limited to historic strategy game in participants' eyes. The most prominent counter example for this is the often-mentioned Cities Skyline, which is about urban planning and the politics surrounding it. Also, not all political settings are associated with history. Alternative examples of this are 'Endless Legends' and 'The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim', which are set in a fantasy world, Age of Empires, which is historical inspired only, or XCOM which is set in a close to present futuristic sci-fi version of Earth.

Games associated with politics are not limited to the genre as strategy, as the numerous mentions of both role play games and shooters, such as Skyrim, Spec: Ops the Line and Call of Duty, show. However as opposed to strategy games, where participants linked politics to game mechanics, politics are considered to be mostly part of the storyline or background.

The notion of politics is however not only limited to what is in the game as content but also who is played with as the repeated discussions of multiplayer versions of games such as Civilization shows. Here, it is the negotiating with and the considerations of fellow human players which seems to be crucial. Overall, this differentiation between human or AI opponents is striking.

A final consideration or rather observation of the actual games associated with politics by participants is about their popularity contrary to the relative 'politicalness' of them. There seems to be a certain bias towards more well known games, such as Civilization, over more detailed ones such as Democracy. While this is very likely due to the popularity of those games that they had chosen, it obviously nevertheless influences the overall notion of 'political games' as described by participants.

Moving on from purely games associated with it, the study also gave an insight into how politics and what kind of politics is associated with games by participants.

Among other things, politics is portrayed through stereotypes and satires thereof for participants, e.g. as discussed in the case of Tropico or the different nationalities found in Civilization.

Following from this however, they, or at least part of the sample, also seem to be aware of the different levels of realism found between different games, as expressed through the survey. This on the one hand shows a certain, at least subjective or perceived, awareness and understanding of what 'politics' in reality means, and is also expressed in their discussion on how being accurate to actual politics might interfere with the 'fun' element of playing games, indicating the importance of 'fun' for them and games in general as well as how 'real politics' and fun do not seem to an easy connection.

In addition, politics is seen as something that can be simulated, as found in Democracy or Cities: Skyline or alternatively, it is simply a variable or different variables that contribute overall and influence certain game mechanics, e.g. in Crusader Kings or Europa Universalis.

Politics is furthermore often associated with or connected to history, but again not limited to a certain time period. As such knowing about history, as well as general politics, is thought to make a difference to the playing experience. This is also found in the tendency for some players to engage into (historic) roleplaying and "what if" scenarios.

The politics associated by participants with games is furthermore not limited to a particular level of politics. While international and national politics are the most common, as e.g. found in Civilizations and many other games, cases of local politics through city planning such as with Cities:Skyline exist also. Several participants also recognised the role of individuals such as soldiers or civilians in conflict situations as part of the greater political spectrum in games, e.g. in Spec Ops: The Line, but this happened far less often than any other notions of politics.

Finally, politics was also put in the context of interacting and negotiating with others, both computer opponents and humans through multiplayer, representing the human and interactive aspects of politics.

The (lack of a) common model of 'politics' in games

Overall, politics in games and political games are not perceived as monolithic, but instead feature a variety of fields and areas.

The most dominant of these are institutional politics, e.g. binational, state-to-state interactions, or state and ruler based, which featured in most of the games mentioned. The often most associated areas and fields were military or use of force based, often with diplomacy as counter measure to the use of force. To a lesser degree elements of micromanagement, e.g. through the notion of economics or trade, and planning, e.g. city planning, are also fairly common.

Politics in games was either thought of as a means to influence game mechanics, mostly in strategy games, or were part of the plot, e.g. in role play- and shooting games. These three plus simulations were also the four genres most often associated with it.

This depiction however opens up the question whether any aspects of 'politics' as we know it in the present might be missing.

Considering, it becomes indeed apparent that the main way of perceiving politics in games is slightly limited, focusing more on the 'bigger picture', states, war and peace, whereas 'the people' apart from being workforce for projects, and general socio-economic factors are seldomly considered. Similarly, the workings of bureaucracy and any administrative side of politics are often ignored, most likely for keeping the, as participants commented on, 'fun element' of the game high. The only popular known example mentioned by two participants would be 'Papers, Please' (Pope, 2013), in which the

player takes on the role of an immigration controller on the border of a fictional state.

There is furthermore very little to no mentioning of personal or identity politics, which as previously mentioned has become a part of the political debate in the last decades. Related to this, the 'personal level' of politics is equally missing. Politics is perceived as states or leader centric as part of a greater historical narrative, which completely overlooks the life of the individuals.

The third big part of politics that is missing from players perception is the general area of values and worldviews. While some participants have indeed commented on this, e.g. on the inherent Western bias in many games – as also pointed out by the literature (Squire, 2006) – others see it as a label associated with a game mechanic and through this divorced from the actual meaning of it. But even these two perspectives are in the stark minority among participants.

There is thus a large part of politics that is 'hidden' for participants, even though they do indeed exist in video games, albeit less easily visible as other aspects.

3.5.2. Players of Political Games

In regards to general motivations to play and goals, the participants of the study broadly reflect what has been established in the video game literature previously on the topic, including elements such as escapism through exploration and immersion, competitiveness in the shape of aggressive play and gaining achievements through challenges, being social through playing with others or receiving gratification through going through the content (Scharkow et al., 2015; Schuurman et al., 2008; Yee, 2006). In addition, there seems to be a stronger emphasis on roleplay and experimenting, as expressed when participants talked about historical accuracy and 'what if' scenarios.

Apart from the last point, the participants are thus not too different from 'average' gamers. Connected to this one might also say, that players of 'political games' or games with political context are not much different from other players in their gaming habits. This could also allow us to treat and assume their behaviour as similar to 'average' gamers in other circumstances as well, which will be helpful for any future research.

Concurrently, it is of interest that 36.9% of participants say that they do not play political games, even though the requirement for taking part in the study was having experience with at least one of the six main games, which all in one way or another feature politics. There could thus be a significant difference in understanding of what politics is or they are not aware of the political tones in the games. Unfortunately, participants negating to play political games, did not have to give any further reasons or examples, making it not possible to gain further insights into this situation.

In regards to political engagement, while the level is obviously very high, there is however quite a difference between 'active' and more passive engagement (e.g. following the news). It is furthermore interesting that some individuals do not consider themselves engaged, but still follow the news / current affairs. This begs the question whether they do not consider this as engaging in politics or whether they do it for other reasons.

Furthermore, the data also replicated what is generally found in the literature on political interest and engagement: education, both political and general, is positively related to increased levels of political engagement and interest in the matter (Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Sunshine Hillygus, 2005).

3.5.3. Interest in politics, engagement and gameplay

As already mentioned above, the relationship between playing political games and being interested in politics is of medium strength. While correlation

cannot be equated with causation, there still seems to be a relationship between the two factors that is reassuring when considering the general capability of video games to promote interest in politics and political engagement.

This is further strengthened by the observation, that there is indeed a difference in levels of engagement – and interest – in politics between players of political games and those who do not.

This does however not apply for actual 'active' engagement into politics in regards to significant difference between player groups. It could thus be the case that political games increase interest in politics, but not affect the player far enough to become more politically active in a non-gaming setting. While the overall outlook is thus promising, further research into this issue is required.

When looking at the difference between different games and their player groups, it is also of interest to compare the findings with how accurate participants consider these games to reflect 'real-world' politics'. Crusader Kings, Europa Universalis and Democracy are considered more realistic than Civilization, Tropico and Galactic Civilizations. This difference is also reflected in the player base and their higher levels of political interest and engagement. It again is however not possible to say whether the games had an impact in this or whether more politically interested individuals tend to be drawn to the more accurate and complex games.

3.6. Conclusion

This study set out to further investigate the space of political games and games with politics in them as well as the people who play them and what relationship the two may have.

It was learnt that what is associated with politics in games and political games is very much associated with institutional politics, and leaves out things such

as socio-economic factors, bureaucracy, identity politics and values, contributing to an overall area of 'hidden politics' in this medium.

The players of political games sampled in this survey were furthermore similar in their gaming habits to other, 'regular' gamer types as described in the literature, which might allow one to characterise them similarly in different regards. In addition, they were interested in politics and this interest and overall engagement with politics increased with more education among participants.

Finally, it was also possible to find a correlation between being interested in politics and playing ''political games'. People considering themselves players of p olitical games had also higher levels of political engagement than those who do not consider themselves as players of political games. Comparing this between games, it could be seen that more complex and accurate games are also associated with players being more interested and engaged in games.

While the relationship between playing political games and being interested in politics is very interesting, it requires further research to better understand the effect one is having on the other. When seeing however how a part of politics is 'hidden' in the perception of players, this becomes a problem for the efforts in better understanding the two as well as creating a common understanding of how politics can feature in games, not least based on how participants have different understanding of what politics in games are.

It seems thus prudent to find a way to make these 'hidden politics' more visible as well as establish a common foundation for talking about politics in games in general, before further going into the relationship between games and political interests. An attempt for this and its application in different activities will be presented in the next chapters.

4. The Politics in Games Framework

4.1. Introduction

When initially setting out to investigate politics in games and how games can be used to promote political engagement, it was first considered to test this through lab studies with participants playing games with different levels of politics and potential for political engagement in them. Soon however, it became apparent that this was not easily possible without a common ground or foundation of understanding and talking about politics in games.

While the literature on general media consumption and voting behaviour (Pinkleton et al., 1998), especially in regards to film and tv series (Fielding, 2014; van Zoonen, 2007b), developed a diverse approach and foundation to the study of political engagement and attitudes, the same was not true for understanding the effect of games on one's political interest.

The framework presented on the following pages and further investigated in the next chapters is thus an attempt at providing a foundation for a common understanding and further analysis of politics in video games and how they can affect one's engagement into politics.

4.2. Goals, objectives and target groups of the framework

As mentioned above, the framework is an attempt to offer a comprehensive foundation for the issue of politics in games as well as games' ability to promote political engagement in players. To make it as accessible and useful not only for the original task at hand, but also to offer a foundation for any general work on politics in games, a number of goals and objectives as well as potential target groups were identified to guide the framework's development and any further testing.

Goals & Objectives

- *Dual use* – The framework not only was supposed to be a tool for analysis, but also enable and support creative and generative use. This was proposed to further the notion of games having the potential to teach and engage with politics. As such, but not limited to, the framework could help in the creation of new games for specific themes or general engagement.

- *Accessible* – The framework should be useable for expert and lay user alike. The framework was developed with a diverse set of target groups in mind, as discussed below. Some of these have more knowledge about politics and/or video games and game design than others. The framework as a foundational tool would thus need to be able to overcome this difference in competences or at least adjust for any differences or lack of knowledge in one field or another.

- *Universal* – The framework would need to be applicable to any notion or kinds of games, not just only those overtly political ones or particular genres and settings, in order to allow better comparisons.

- *Comprehensive* – Following up from the above point as well as the insights of the landscaping survey discussed in chapter 3, the framework would need to be capable of depicting both institutional and 'informal' politics and thus making potential hidden political aspects of a game more visible

- *Comparison* – In order to work as a foundation and to further the discussion on politics in games, the framework needs not only to be a tool for comparing games for their political content but also provide users with a universal language that allows a deeper and better discussion of the matter than has been the case until now.

Target Groups

As mentioned above when talking about the framework's goals and objectives, different purposes and abilities of the framework were planned out with different target groups and demographics in mind.

The target groups are broadly distributed under three non-exclusive categories:

- *Identifying and analysing politics in games*

  o Researchers and scholars

  o Critics and journalists

  o Educators

  o Interested players

- *Creativity and generative purposes*

  o Designers

  o Developers

  o Artists

- *(Political-) Engagement promotion*

  o Activists

  o Policy makers

  o Educators

  o Public bodies

The first category contains the stakeholders who would use the framework to identify political elements in existing games. Some of them, especially researchers, we envision to using the framework to further the academic debate on politics in games and how they could be used to promote political engagement. Others, such as representatives of media outlets, could embed

the framework in their ongoing work of critiquing and reviewing games. The framework would give them an additional layer and deeper level of insight and understanding of a game at hand. It could furthermore be used in the ongoing debate on whether games are political in the first place or not (Bown, 2018; Chmielarz, 2017; Kain, 19 C.E.). Finally, educators could also use the framework when teaching about historical and political situations in more interactive way.

The second category includes groups that are envisioned using the framework mostly for creative or other generative activities. How it is used might however vary greatly between groups. As such it is likely that designers might use the framework more for ideation purposes, giving them new or different way to express their ideas. Game developers on the other hand who work to realise somebody else's idea might use the framework more as a general structuring tool against which they can check their work. Artists finally might use elements of both groups, gaining inspirations as well as structure from the framework.

The first and final group of interested parties includes those individuals and bodies that are particularly interested in promoting political engagement. Some of these, like activists, are more likely to use the framework to promote a single smaller or larger cause. Others, such as educators in citizenship and civil values might find the framework useful, for promoting political engagement and interest in politics in general, through showing their students how politics can even be found in such everyday things as video games. Finally, it is also envisioned that not only individuals but also larger bodies such as policy makers or other public bodies could make use of the framework. Here the emphasis would likely be more on generating awareness for certain bigger causes, e.g. Human Rights or the importance of voting, as well as understanding better the effects games can have in general.

4.3. Framework development

As is further described below when going through the individual elements of the framework, the conceptual heart in regards to what politics is and what elements are important to political engagement are taken from Political Science. This is then transferred into the sphere of game design. The framework thus embodies the attempt to create interdisciplinary research between these two spheres, resulting in a novel approach in handling politics in games and political engagement.

When developing the framework, there was very little in regard to existing literature on framework or taxonomies on which to fall back. While, as discussed in the literature review in chapter 2, there have been efforts to further categorise and taxonomize games in the past, none seemed appropriate to apply to the field of politics. This was thus yet another reason to approach the framework development from a political science angle, taking ways to describe and categorise politics from the field of comparative politics and related areas as well as integrating what political science and political psychology view on political engagement.

A further factor in pursuing the development of the framework were the findings of the initial landscaping study discussed in chapter 3. To reiterate its findings, politics in games was mostly associated with institutional politics, the use of force and strategy games, with many more recent concepts such as identity- and personal politics being hidden and unknown. These findings encouraged me to find a way to make these 'hidden' aspects of politics in games more visible. This was deemed important to allow for a more 'holistic' discussion on politics in games, especially facing the above-mentioned discussion on whether games are or should be political, as well as to increase people's awareness of politics in games in general.

In addition, the study also found a correlation between playing 'political games' and being interested in politics. The framework was thus also set out

to be a tool to consider this relationship further and provide a grounding for future work in this direction.

Initially, there was also the decision to be made whether the tool should be a framework or a taxonomy. In the end, developing a framework won out based on the fact that it should not only be something to help others analyse games or be a 'lens' to identify politics in games, but also be useful for generative purposes as discussed above. A framework thus seemed the more flexible option.

Finally, and for completion purposes only, it seems appropriate to point out that another framework on designing games for political participation was published during the development process of this framework (Reid, 2015). This framework however looks at the matter only from a game design perspective and is only interested in political participation, while being not founded in political science at all. It is made for creation rather than analysis. While it encouraging to see that the topic of political participation and engagement is becoming of greater interest in the literature, the development of the framework was already underway and due to its different focus and approach did not influence this framework in the slightest.

4.4. The Politics in Games Framework

4.4.1. Overview on framework

The Politics in Games framework was developed to facilitate discussion, analysis and creation of video games with political content as well as its potential for creating and promoting political engagement. It was devised in a way to cater for a wide variety of potential users, ranging from academic researchers, video game industry employees, activists and interested players of games. As such it is aimed at experts and lay users alike.

The framework is made of two different variable sets, with different, yet related purposes (see figure 13).

Set 1 is focused on 'Games and Political Engagement'. It considers factors for political engagement in the game. This is done through featuring the three most renown elements for the existence and development of political engagement and interest in Political Science. They are expressed through the variables *Agency*, *Form* and *Knowledge*.

The second variable set is concerned with the bigger and richer picture of politics in a game. It functions to find and identify politics as well as giving context to it and any findings of variable set 1. Set 2 also consists of three different variables, *Goal, Area* and *Method*.

The framework is made to be of a modular nature. Depending on the task at hand, e.g. when political engagement is not of interest, only one of the two or both variable sets which can be used independently from the other.
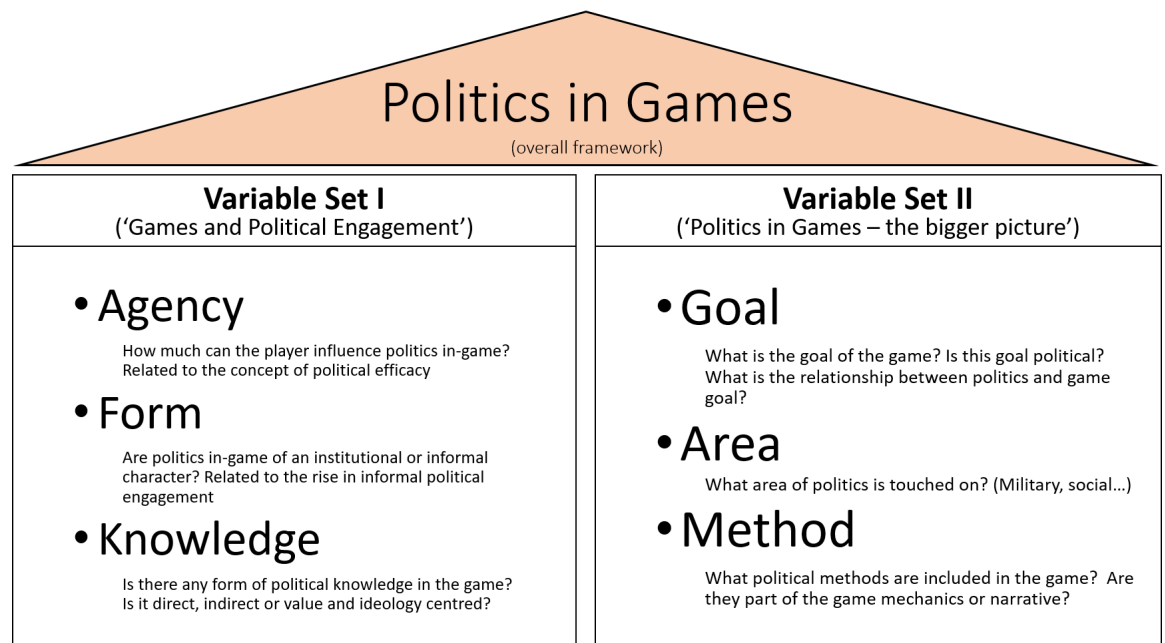

Figure 13 The Politics in Games Framework

The following will give a quick overview of each variable, with a more in-depth description, including its origin, use cases, sub-categories and examples, following below.

Set 1 'Political Engagement'

Agency:

Agency describes the level of influence the player can have on politics, political elements and the political process. This can range from being merely a spectator without any influence, to having free range of deciding on any political activities, potentially only limited by the game's structure and mechanics.

Form:

Form describes what form of politics can be found in the game. Generally, there are two forms of politics: institutional, e.g. by official political bodies, and informal. 'Informal' in the engagement relevant way refers to new and alternative ways of 'doing' and trying to influence politics, e.g. through online petitions or rallies. In other circumstances this can also refer to the unofficial ways institutional politics can work, e.g. an unspoken behaviour codex in certain groups as well as illegal practices such as bribery. Games can include one, serval or none of these forms of politics.

Knowledge:

As the name suggests, 'knowledge' does involve every aspect of learning about politics in a game. Knowing how the political process operate is one of the biggest factors in developing interest and engagement into politics. Knowledge can have different forms. It can be *direct*, e.g. when facts are given straight to the player; *indirect* – when the knowledge is in the background and thus is picked-up unconsciously; when it is randomly found and finally it can also come in the shape of *values* or ideologies. Knowledge about politics can either stem from the real world or reflect the situation in the game world.

Set 2 'The Bigger Picture'

Goal:

'Goal' is about a game's goals, aims and objectives, how they are reached and what is its relation to politics. Initially, 'Goal' is just interested in learning about the game's general goal and what is needed to 'win' the game. In a second round of considerations, it is questioned whether and how the goals are political.

Area:

'Area' refers to the different areas, or subjects, sub-sections or levels, of politics that are featured or touched on in the game. These are initially considered quite broadly, e.g. the 'military', 'social politics' or 'international politics', but can be refined when and if necessary, to receive a better image of the overall political landscape of the game.

Method:

'Method' refers to the political methods found in the game. 'Political methods' include any way politics are made and enacted. This includes anything from classic cases of politics such as policy and law making and use of force to less legitimate activities such as bribery or espionage.

Some remarks on how to use the framework

The idea when using the framework as a whole or one of its components, is that one variable can have more than one 'value' or rather it can include more than one different category of aspects within it. E.g. when considering a game's *methods,* 'use of force' and 'negotiations' can both feature. A variable is not exclusively associated with one thing or category.

The framework itself can, as put forward in its general goal and objective discussed above, be used for two different purposes: analysis of games and creation of game ideas.

The generative aspect to the framework is relatively free and uncontracted. Designers choose different elements and variables according to what they wish to include and portray in their game and build a game around it. Alternatively, they can start with a basic idea and use the framework as guidance and scaffolding. The 'ideation potential' and how users implemented it will be discussed further in chapter 6.

The analytical process supported by the framework is more structured. Here, each individual variable is searched for and analysed in a game. Once an element is found, it can be categorised in one of the sub-categories of each variable. Each variable has a slightly different approach and analytical process behind it, which will be discussed below in more detail. Once all variables are accounted for, an overall analysis and image of politics in the game can be constructed.

By investigating the variables' existence and contents in the game of interest, users can draw a better image of the political elements in the game as well as what engagement increasing factors can be found in it. This then allows to better gauge the potential for political engagement and interest gained through playing the game, but also facilitates better comparisons between games, their content and 'engagement potential'.

By doing so, it should however be remembered that this framework does not seek to quantify the 'ability to engage with politics' for each game, but instead allows for a relative measure that features an improved view and understanding of the politics in a game and how it could potential help with promising political engagement.

Furthermore, the framework is not dependent on every of its variables existing in the game at hand. Games without politics in them can be still used with it. The result in this case would simply be that a variable does not have any 'value' or 'content' in the game or simply that it is 'not'.

4.4.2. Set 1 'Political Engagement'

As mentioned above, the first set of variables of the framework consists of the three main factors commonly associated with increased political engagement in the political science literature. The three variables in the set are *Agency*, *Form* and *Knowledge*.

4.4.2.1. Agency

The *Agency* variable describes how much influence the player can have on politics and the political process in the game. This can be either through their in-game avatar, a character or they directly themselves.

The notion of A*gency* is adopted from the concept of political efficacy, a concept found in the political science literature and often considered as one of the most important factors in political engagement in individuals. Political efficacy describes the subjective feeling of an individual to be able to influence the political process. 'Influence' is fairly flexible in its meaning, ranging from anything between having one's voice heard to actively influencing a policy outcome. The literature distinguishes between two different kinds of political efficacy, *external* efficacy and *internal* efficacy. External efficacy describes the feeling of being directly able to influence the political process through one's actions as well as how political institutions and actors re-act to these actions. Internal efficacy is less direct, but instead expresses the feeling of understanding the political process and being aware of how it can be influenced if needed. It also reflects awareness of one's political capacities (Balch, 1974; Coleman et al., 2008; Converse, 1972). While thus describing slightly different sensations, both forms of political efficacy have a similar effect: being able to 'have a say' in politics, in one way or another, makes it far more likely for individuals to engage in politics.

Given the importance of political efficacy for political engagement it seemed appropriate to include it in the framework, in variable set, focusing on political engagement. The variable *Agency* is an expression of the level of political efficacy and therefore an influence in the politics and political decisions making process the player can have in a game. The focus here is more on active decision making and influencing, favouring the experience of external efficacy, as it is easier to measure and find out about when analysing a game. Internal efficacy is nevertheless not to be neglected, though it more understood as understanding and learning about the mechanics of influencing politics in the game. As such, it is equally relevant to the 'knowledge' variable found below. Finally, the variable is not to be confused with general player agency as used when discussing game design (Jaime Banks & Bowman, 2013; Thue et al., 2011; Tulloch, 2010). While there is certainly a level of interconnection between the two, it should be strictly separated when analysing or creating a game through the framework.
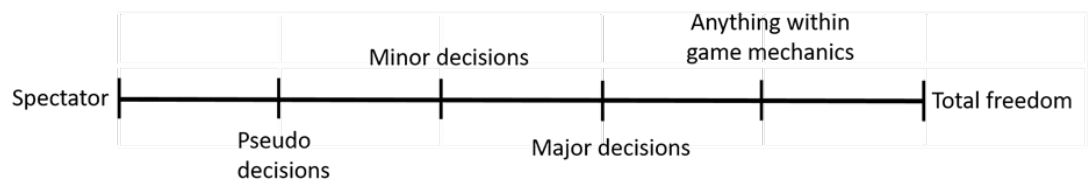
Figure 14 The spectrum of political agency in-game

When considering a game's *Agency* through various case studies in the development of the framework, it was observed that it is difficult for a fast and hard measurement of how much political agency a player has. As such, it is not recommended to look for a specific measurement of it, but instead consider the relative political agency the player has in the game.

Agency, as it is conceptualised in this framework, is a spectrum. It ranges from having no political agency at all on the one side, rendering the player a mere spectator in the political process, to 'total freedom' in deciding on political

matters on the other side. Between these two extremes, four relative different levels can be found (see figure 14).

The different stages are:

- **Spectator**: The player does not have any political agency and thus cannot change anything about the political situation in-game. The player and the player's character might be a tool of change in the game, but there is no agency in regards choosing what to do as there is no choice in the matter. An example of this are the many classical first-person shooters in which the player is considered the 'hero' that repels and overcomes the enemy forces in warfare, but can eventually not choose to do anything else but to shoot the enemy.

- **Pseudo decisions:** A pseudo decision scenario is present when the player is given options during the game, but this will not change the end outcome of the game or story, making the player's choice neglectable. An example of this is that dialog options in many games, which will cause a different answer, but do not change any other aspect of the game. In regards to politics this could be voicing the support for a different faction during an election, without actually being able to make a difference to the election's outcome.

- **Minor change**: The ability to cause minor changes allows players to e.g. cause small changes in the plot, which may however not be permanent. Alternatively, it might also be something related to what project is worked/researched on next. The ability to do minor changes can e.g. be found in *Divinity: Original Sin*'s second to last boss fight, where the player can choose to reconcile two factions or not, depending on prior actions.

- **Major change**: Major changes include for example causing very different endings, they have overall more gravity on game play and/or narrative and are likely to be permanent. Coming back to the faction

support example, the players inference or vocalised support could help one faction be victorious in a given situation.

- **Anything within the mechanics**: This category, as the name suggests, gives the player a high degree of freedom to decide and influence that is only really limited by the, usually fairly generous, game mechanics. A lot of grand and 4X strategy games allow for this to various degrees, giving the player the agency to decide where and when to build cities, what policies to adopt, who to fight and so on.

- **Total freedom**: In this scenario, the player is at total liberty to influence the political processes in-game, giving him/her almost god-like abilities. While theoretically possible, it is however a situation that is unlikely to occur in a normal gaming setting, unless the player employs something like cheats or mods, as this kind of total freedom would allow the player to overcome and change existing game mechanisms.

Examples for Agency in games

Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare 2

Call of Duty is a first-person shooter and an example for a game with 'spectator' level of agency.

Politics are part of the background and narrative of the Call of Duty. As part of the game, the player is fighting 'terrorists' and is thus 'saving' people from them. While it could be argued that the player takes political action through shooting the opponents, making politics through warfare, it should be remembered that the player does not really have a choice in the matter and thus no real agency to influence the political process. The player's character is told to shoot the terrorists, and other opponents, and is afterwards applauded for it. There is however not an option to not shoot them, or even

try to interact with them in any other way. Thus, making for a 'spectator' kind of game, in which politics is touched upon and happens around the player's character in game, but no opportunity for making one's own opinion heard is given. Instead most non-combat interactions are shown either via cut scene or through 'press button to this' and move on with the game options.

Civilization V

Civilization V is a turn based '4X' strategy game and an example of a game that allows political agency for 'anything within the game mechanics'.

In the game the player takes on the role of leader of a nation and leads his or her nation throughout the times from the pre-classical era to modern times. The game provides the player with various opportunities to influence various political elements of running a state, e.g. military, infrastructure, research, social policy and diplomacy. It is thus possible to influence various aspects of political process to the player's desire as long as necessary in-game resources are available. While the ways of influencing the political process might not be a complete and accurate representation of how similar processes work in the real-world, it nevertheless allows the player to experience a high level of in-game political efficacy and agency over the political process.

The Elder Roles V: Skyrim

Skyrim is an open world roleplay game and an example of a game giving players major decision-making powers and agency.

The title giving province of Skyrim in which the story of the game takes place is torn by a civil war. Throughout the game the player is faced with members of both factions of the conflict as well as sub-plots that are related to the overall political situation. Players can choose to support one of the two factions or stay neutral. Depending on the players' choice, the civil war will play out differently, giving the player the agency to not only change the

narrative and aspects of the end of the game, but also shape Skyrim's map and the lives of many of its inhabitants, creating a high level of political agency for the player without giving him or her overly unrealistic, within a fantasy setting that is, abilities and agency.

4.4.2.2.   Form

The *Form* variable describes the way politics is organised or the form politics or any political activities take in a game. When referring to 'form' in this context, it is referred to as the contrasting spheres of institutional or formal politics and informal politics. Institutional politics includes any form of government and elections and is thus what most people imagine when hearing the term 'politics'. Informal politics are thus everything that is political and/or tries to influence the political process, but not is not part of official or traditional organised politics. The most common activities related to informal politics, at least in the real world, are signing petitions and joining protests through physically attending rallies, boycotting products or changing consumption behaviours as well as simply discussing politics with one's environment. All these activities are often helped by or even entirely made possible through the internet and social media (Dimitrova & Bystrom, 2013; Loader, 2007; Stolle et al., 2005). This is to be differentiated from an alternative use of the term 'informal politics', which refers to the informal ways political institutions are working and their specific internal dynamics (Kleine, 2018; McAdam et al., 1996; Waggoner, 2017). For both cases it can be observed that some behaviours and actions are within legal confines, whereas others are more problematic and illegal, e.g. in the cases of corruption, clientelism, but also threats of putsches or civil unrest (Lauth, 2000).

In the political science literature, recent decades have seen a growth in interest in citizen's acts of and involvement in informal politics. While in general participation in the traditional political process, e.g. through taking

part in elections or party membership, has been on the decline, there is an increase in informal participation (Fox, 2014; Ormston & Curtice, 2015). Furthermore, it has also been shown that taking part in informal politics is associated with increased levels of political engagement (McClurg, 2006; Norris, 2005) As such, when applying the findings of political science to the gaming world, considering the forms of politics a player is faced with in the gaming world could be a useful indicator when researching the potential to increase political engagement through games.
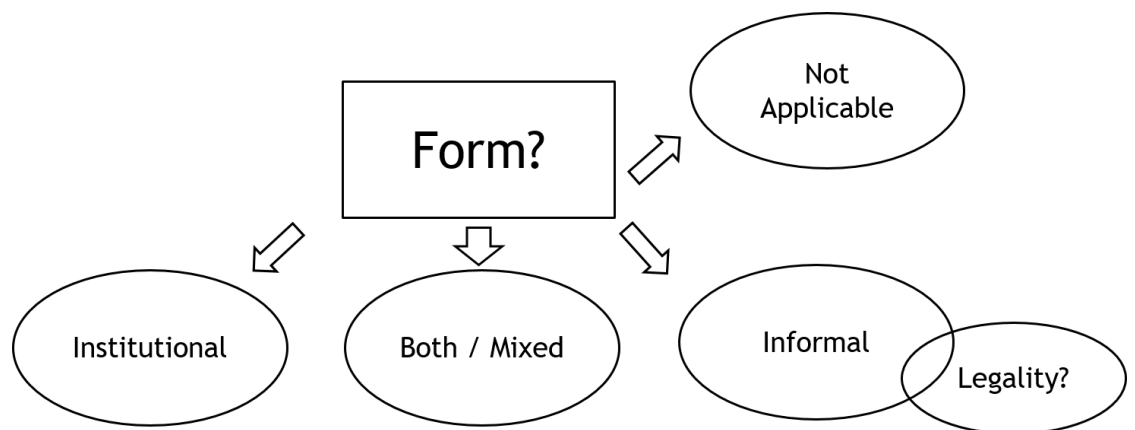
Figure 15 The difference Forms of politics

For the use of *Form* in the framework, four main categories or 'values' were defined through considerations of both the literature and existing games (see figure 15). The first two are direct adoptions from what is found in the literature: 'institutional' and 'informal' politics or political activity. It was however also found that not all games can be put into these two categories. Therefore, two other categories were added in order to cover all possible game types: 'mixed' as well as 'none' or 'not applicable'. In addition, when referring to informal politics, it should be considered what kind of 'informal' is meant and how legal it is.

The more detailed definitions of these categories are:

- **Institutional**: Politics and political activities in-game are only happening in organised and institutional environments. These can be any form of government bodies, including the military, but also traditional ways of citizen participation such as voting.

- **Informal**: Politics and related activities are portrayed outside of the official political institutions. These can include acts from protest or informal ways of letting once voice heard and influencing the political process to mundane activities such as talking about politics in an informal environment with one's family or friends. This category is particularly important when considering the potential for political engagement in a game.

  - *Legality:* While political science usually focuses on the legal side of informal politics – which is slightly different from informal politics of organisations, i.e. informal rules how certain things are done – there is also the possibility that informal political activities can be considered illegal. Examples for these kinds of activities are various illegal use of force scenarios, such as guerrilla warfare or property destruction. These cases should be separated from legal activities for purposes of considering political engagement.

- **Mixed**: Not all situations or games can be a clear-cut decision between institutional and informal political activity. Often an informal act can lead to an institutional decision, e.g. when a petition results in an official statement of a government body or an institutional decision can result in an informal reaction of the public, e.g. when a law new leads to protest marches. Alternatively, in the game world different game mechanics are linked to two different kinds of activities, one institutional, the other informal. In all the above cases the game contains 'mixed' forms of politics.

- **Not applicable**: Not all games include politics or political elements and thus do not have a type of 'form' of politics. In these cases, the 'not applicable' category is used.

Examples for Form in games

Civilization 5

The whole Civilization series is an easy to recognise example for institutional politics in games, albeit with some limitations how good its depiction of the same is. With the player acting as head of government, all of his or her actions are within the 'official' realm of politics. There is no opportunity to take part in informal political activities. Instead any decisions are made top-down as decided by the player. While thus very institution orientated, the game is however not very realistic in regards to how most non-authoritarian institutional politics are 'done', cases of presidential decrees notwithstanding. It furthermore minimises the aspect of citizen participation to a dichotomy of 'unhappy vs satisfied citizens' and citizens asking for certain resources. When it comes to the aspect of governing one's people however, many aspects and areas of institutional politics are featured. These include social policies, trade and international politics as well as making decisions on city constructions and development. Civilization 5 is thus showcasing various aspects of institutional politics, including the different levels on which institutional politics can happen, while leaving other parts that would be considered important in the real worlds out in favour of giving the player more freedom in playing the game.

Sim City 2000

Sim City 2000 is primarily an example for institutional politics in the shape of city building and governing through the player taking on the role of a city's mayor. Again, similar to Civilization, the player does not have to fear elections and thus potentially loose his/her office, yet popularity and citizen's satisfaction is still measured. Furthermore, institutional politics are happening on the smaller, more limited level of local politics. While neighbouring cities

do exist, they are rarely of major importance for the player. The game is however making up for its lack in scope with added details and depth around its core concern: city building. There are furthermore elements of informal political participation in the game, most prominently in the shape of citizens' protests which can hinder construction work and overall approval. Therefore, Sim City can be considered a limited example of 'mixed' forms of politics in a game.

Grand Theft Auto 5

Grand Theft Auto is an open world action game with elements of roleplay games and life of crime simulator. The game in direct and indirect ways includes both formal and informal politics.

In regards to formal politics, there are two main elements. First is the ongoing election campaign in background of the game world and for example be found when candidates give interviews on the in-game radio stations. The second element are representatives of various government agencies. These includes the police as well as the games versions of the FBI and CIA. While the relationship between police and player is fairly straightforward, the police is going to be alert and will pursue the player's characters if they break the law too often or too obviously, the one between the federal agencies and the game's protagonist are a little shadier. This is due to certain rouge elements of each agency trying to use and hire the protagonists for their own goals. The game thus presents an aspects of illegal and informal ways formal politics can be conducted. While an interesting and different depiction of politics, 'informal formal' politics is not of interest is usually not of primary interest when the promotion of political engagement is concerned. It is thus more a matter of the 'flavouring' of politics in a game.

Examples for informal political activities in-game can be found through individuals talking to each other about politics related topics. One example for this again found one of the radio talk shows, when the female radio host

accuses her male co-host of being sexist.

Overall it can be said that the formal aspects of politics in-game are far more easily visible to the player than the informal ones are. Judging from other examples that were analysed for this framework, this seems to be a general trend as institutional politics is often far more recognisable as such than informal ways can be.

4.4.2.3.   Knowledge

The Knowledge variable describes whether any political and civic knowledge can be found in the game and if so, in what way this is done. Political and civic knowledge include any information that addresses a political situation, duties or concepts, whether these may be in-game or real world associated. In contrast to this is the notion of general knowledge in a game. Game knowledge, as defined for the purpose of this framework, includes everything that is needed to play a game, usually delivered in the form of a tutorial, as well as additional knowledge that is associated with and found in the game and enriches the overall gaming experience through better understanding of what is happening on screen. As such, political knowledge can be part of the general game knowledge, e.g. when the political situation of the in-game world is explained, and this makes it easier for the players to immerse themselves in the world.

Knowledge and education are important factors in developing political engagement and general interest in politics as well as supporting democratic values (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Dudley & Gitelson, 2002; Galston, 2001; Popkin & Dimock, 1999). Thus, when considering the 'engagement potential' of a game, which is what part of the motivation for this framework is, it seems necessary to include and consider all main factors that are regarded as important in the general political engagement' literature.

The way knowledge can improve political engagement is often modelled as following (see also figure 16 for an overview): Through political knowledge one can form an informed opinion on current affairs and the general political system. This opinion can then be discussed and articulated among other citizens. Discussions can lead to strengthening of opinions, and potentially building of interest groups, that will eventually lead to individual and joint action and efforts to influence the political process, i.e. individuals become engaged into politics.

Furthermore, knowing and understanding the political process is also linked to the presence of internal political efficacy, the believe that one can influence the political process because one knows how it works, another important factor for the development of political engagement.

Know and learn about politics | Formation of opinion | Discuss/Articulate | Take action
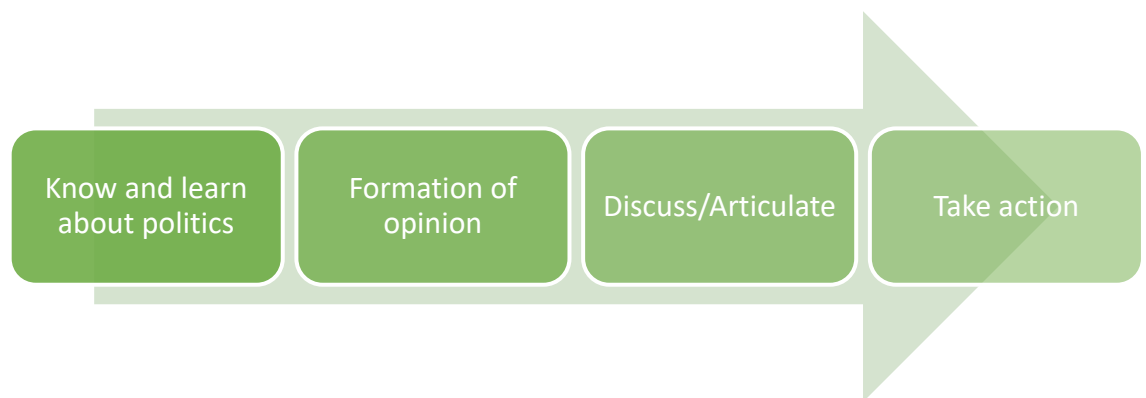
Figure 16 The influence of knowledge on political engagement

There are many ways of how (political) knowledge can be considered when looking at a game. The Politics in Games framework focuses on how (political) knowledge is framed in a game as well as what type of knowledge is present. Particularly, whether it is made to look and be especially educational and/or political, if it is factional or values based, how prominent sources of political knowledge are in the game and how political knowledge related to general game related knowledge.

While it would also be possible to measure the amount of political knowledge found in-game, this brings up the problem of comparability, different games can feature very different forms of knowledge, as well as quantification as it is

difficult to decide whether 'more but shallow' or 'less, but deeper' knowledge offered should be considered 'more knowledge'. Knowledge and how it is framed is also of potential interest from a game design point of view as learning, even if it is just focusing on how to play a game, are essential to good design and gaming experience.

Furthermore, it needs to be considered whether there are any linkages between the real political world and the in-game world as learning about a specific in-game political system may be educational, but at the same time not useful for understanding real world politics.

When referring to *Knowledge* through the framework, there are three major categories that can be applied:

Direct Knowledge:

Knowledge or facts are put directly in front of the player. This can happen either for educational or game related purposes and can, but does not need to be, related to real-world political situations.

Indirect Knowledge:

Sometimes knowledge about politics can be found more subtly in games, e.g. through background activities, the world building or in hidden away parts of the game that the player does not necessarily have to encounter in order to play a game.

(Political-) Values and ideologies:

Values and ideologies can feature more or less direct in a game. They can be part of the game world, narrative or underlying the creation of the game through its designers and developers.

These categories are not mutual exclusive; thus a game can have various sources and forms of *knowledge* in it. The Knowledge can be related and taken from the real world, but can also be purely related to the game world. In this case, it is advised to consider how the game world is related to the real world and how or if elements of the setting can be carried over to real world.

Examples for Knowledge in games

Civilization 5

Due to the nature of the game, the player is the ruler of a nation throughout different time periods, Civilization 5 is full of different forms of learning opportunities about politics. Some are more overtly framed as such than others.

Political knowledge is built into the game through game mechanics and general game play. However not all knowledge is presented the same way and some is more overtly framed as knowledge about politics than others.

The knowledge aspect that is most openly framed as political, and could thus be referred to as 'direct knowledge' as well as potentially educational are the explanations of in-game concepts found in the 'civiopedia'. While these informational texts discuss only (political) concepts that are found in the game, it is done in a way that makes clear that these in-game concepts are inspired or originate from real world political concepts and entities. Reading these additional information is however completely optional to the actual game. While they can provide the player with a deeper understanding of why an in-game mechanism works the way it does, it will however not give them insight into how this translates into game play and tactics. This is done in an additional part of each concept's entry. The two are thus fairly separated from one another and therefore an example of how political knowledge and pure game knowledge can differ.

The same is done for other game mechanics, such as unit types and buildings. Here however, the focus is more upon what something is doing through the description of tactical usage and the added, mostly historical, context is found in the aftermath of the first. There is thus a connection between the two, as in 'this is what it does in the game and this is the historic inspiration for it'. Thus giving more potential insight and understanding into the existence of individual units. However, rather than being framed in terms of political

knowledge, the emphasis here is on historical knowledge, from which political knowledge can be extracted. Finally, as in the case with general concepts, the articles on units etc. are more proposed as additional material to help players play the game rather than being purely educational.

There are furthermore other aspects to the game that are less overtly framed as political knowledge and can thus be classified as 'indirect knowledge'. One of these is the general depiction of politics, and history, in the game. When playing, the player is handling many elements of 'politics' and government, e.g. aspects of resource distribution, through the game mechanics without being always explicitly told 'this is political'.

Furthermore, mechanics such as social policies, which include aspects of government types among other things, or diplomacy between factions include knowledge, but it is less obviously framed as such and not quite as in-depth in regards to information provided. The meaning for in-game events are, again, in the foreground for this.

Knowing the meaning of these is thus important in the game and therefore a basic understanding of political concepts as found in the game is beneficial to playing to playing. However, concepts as-represented-in-game cannot simply be equated with real world concepts, as their in-game representation is simplified. It is ultimately down to the player to read up on and differentiate between the two. Moreover, as mentioned above, a lot of knowledge in-game is framed in terms of historical events and processes rather than purely political meaning. Examples for these are some of the above mentioned civiopedia articles as well as the scenario settings included in the game.

Finally, there is also the in earlier chapters discussed ideological bias to Civilization, which is often said to be Western centric and Imperialist among others in its depiction of politics, history and the development of cultures and societies, leading to highly screwed understanding of the former (Ford, 2016; Koabel, 2017; Schut, 2007).

The example of Civilization thus shows that a single game can have more than one type of political knowledge. Though Civ's case might be more 'extreme' as some of the political knowledge it provides is explicitly put forward as knowledge about the real world rather than relating or being useful for the game world alone, while others are the opposite. Furthermore, due to the way the game is played, knowledge about politics, whether only in-game related or general, are important to the general game play and appropriately prominent throughout the game, having the potential to, ideological underlying notwithstanding, make players more aware of the topical area in general.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Skyrim, the fifth title in the Elder Scrolls series, is an open-world roleplay game set in the fictitious world of Tamriel. Politics, especially the power struggle between the two civil war parties in the eponymous Skyrim province, are an important aspect to parts of the narrative and world design of the game. As such a lot of political knowledge found in the game is introduced through the narrative by way of different means ranging from quests to background NPC conversations.

The way political knowledge is framed however, is more done towards the goal of explaining reasons behind different parties' actions and the overall situation in Skyrim. Thus having primarily a world building agenda, rather than aiming to educate the player about politics and thus fitting more the character of *indirect knowledge*.

This is also visible through the way certain elements of the workings of the political system of Skyrim and the wider world are dealt with. The province of Skyrim resembles in many ways a Feudal society, but in no way is this ever explained, neither how the system works and what individual titles of office mean. To understand this, the player thus either needs to have external political or historical knowledge and/or experience from previous games in

the Elder Scrolls series. There is thus no effort made to connect events, and knowledge, from the in-game to the real world. While thus a politically educated player might see similarities between the two, e.g. in the themes nationalism or racism, the game frames both as unrelated entities.

Furthermore, being an open-world game, the player can choose to what degree he or she wants to interact with the 'political knowledge' aspect of the game. The experience can thus vary tremendously, ranging from little knowledge experienced due to lack of particular quests done to intense involvement with the world's lore and political situation through quests and additional objects found in-game such as maps or books giving more in-depth knowledge about the setting, past and present.

The Sims 4

The political knowledge found in the Sims is not framed as such. There are no additional texts or dialogues giving the player further insight into the matter in the in-game world or real world. Furthermore, experiencing the 'political' side of Sims is completely optional to the player. 'Politics' or being a politician is one of the possible career choices the player can make for their Sim and thus only another version of the 'job' game mechanic.

Thus, most if not any of the knowledge that can be gained in the game is associated how politics and politicians are depicted in-game. The Sims being close to a 'life simulator', it thus uses real world notions of what a politician is like to present politics in the game. There is thus a slight connect between real world and in-game world. However, giving that the job mechanic is at best a superficial representation of each occupation, each having certain requirement to be able to do a job and changing job titles, but the player does not actually do anything on the job, making the exact occupation more a matter of 'flavour' in the game. The way politics is framed and depicted in-game is thus similarly superficial and mostly offers stereotypes.
While Sims 4, in contrasts to earlier editions of the game, offers the player

also the opportunity to become an activist, later to become a charity organiser, rather than a career politician, and thus depicts politics as more than just 'man in suits kissing babies' (one of the social action options for the politician career), it never gives the player any indication why somebody would want to engage in promoting any of the possible causes an activist can engage with.

When choosing the 'politician' career track, players are limited to stereotypical politician behaviour, such as the above baby kissing action, or promising policy changes (these can be empty or not according to players' choice) or even take bribes, which can cost one's job if found out. It thus teaches the player very little about actual politics or policy making.

While thus being framed as 'real-life inspired', the way politics is depicted and what can be learned from this is very limited and if anything at all, thus at best be described as a low level of *indirect knowledge* that features in the game. The presentation and knowledge conveyed in the game only help to reinforce existing perceptions of politics rather than provide better understanding. As such it is unlikely to be helpful in increasing political engagement from the 'knowledge' perspective, as it does not help in forming an educated opinion on politics.

4.4.3. Set 2 'The Bigger Picture'

The second variable set of the framework is more interested in the overall politics, in particular its location and context, thus enabling the creation of a bigger and richer picture of politics in the game.

The three variables in this set are *Goals, Area* and *Method*.

4.4.3.1.   Goal

As the name suggests, *Goal* describes the goal of a game. In particularly, the overall goal of the game, what needs to be done to accomplish it and how this relates to politics.

A three step process has been devised to answer these questions in order to come up with a fairly standardised description (see figure 17).

The initial question focuses on the goal of the game. This should be answered in regards to the context of the game as well as general terms such a 'domination' of something, solving a problem or something different entirely. Some potential categories for goals are:

- (World-) Domination

- Survival

- Resource acquisition and growth

- Progress

- Be the first or be the best

- Puzzle solving

- Simulation

Once the goal has been defined in general terms, consideration is given to what the player needs to do in order to achieve it. Again, general terms in order to make future comparison and categorization easier are preferred. Possible answers include:

- Rescue someone or escape from somewhere

- Capture terrain or units

- Race to be the first to finish or reach something

- Aligning (puzzle) pieces

- Constructing something

- Exploration

- Finding solutions to problems

- Outwitting opponents

Once these two steps have been taken, the process is moved on to the potential political nature of the game's goal. The overall question for this last step is what is the relationship between goals and politics are. To help and guide in answering this, three sub-questions can be asked. The most important one of these is whether any of the goals are political. Once this is established, other aspects related to some of the other variables can be considered. One is the player's role in the goals and its relation to politics. This is related to the notion of *Agency* as a more proactive role might lead to an increased feeling of (political) efficacy. Another one related to this is the ability to have a choice in the political matter surrounding the goal, which again relates to the feeling of *Agency* and efficacy.
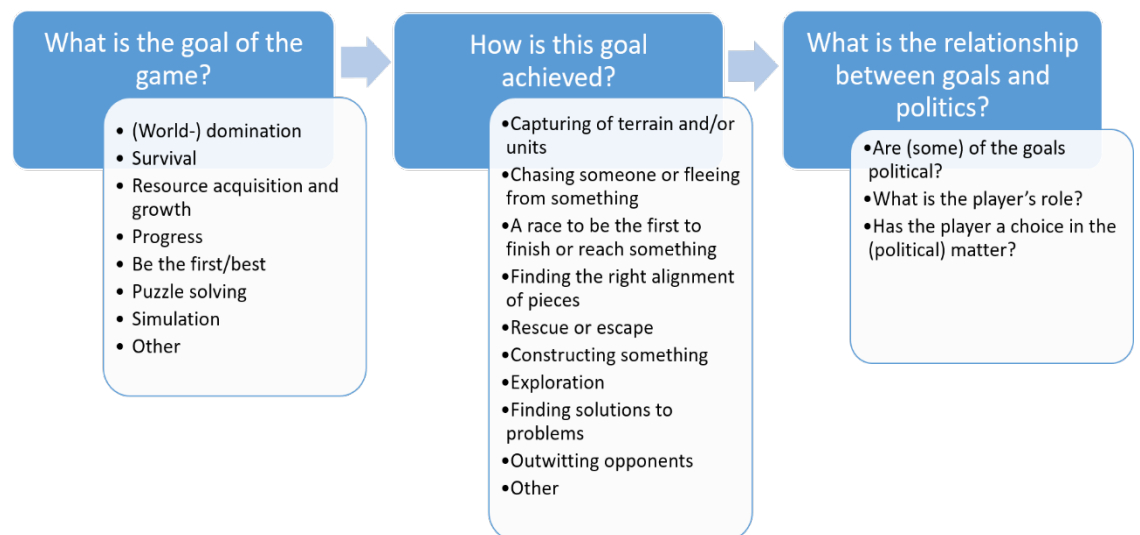

Figure 17 The three steps leading to the Goal variable

The above process is meant to provide the framework user with a better understanding of the general and political goals of a game. It furthermore helps to see and understand any potential 'politics' behind the overall set-up

of a game, including aspects of ideologies and values. Finally, it is also an additional way to describe and categorize games.

Examples of Goals of games

Stellaris

As mentioned above, the sci-fi grand strategy game Stellaris has three different victory conditions. Fulfilling any of them will make the player win the game. Applying the general categories, it can be said that the game's goals made up by aspects of (galaxy) domination, resource acquisition and growth in order to be able to dominate and potentially also becoming the first or best in regards to either subjugating or eradicating all other space empires. This is achieved through, again based on the general categories, capturing terrain in space in order to dominate, constructing a thriving empire and economy as well as exploring the galaxy map in preparation to expand one's empire.

How are these goals political? In two different ways. The very act of world domination is political as it assumes a form of control over a territory. It also very likely can lead to conflict with other powers in the game territory. Furthermore, resource acquisition and growth is very much based on the modern notion of politics being primarily about resource distribution and thus political by definition.
Achieving this by capturing terrain again opens up the possibility for conflict between different political entities. Constructing a working empire is strongly linked to the notion of government and as such also political. The player is the main ruler and as such has a lot of potential for high levels of *agency*. This is additionally helped by the fact that the player is also the main decision maker in-game and thus has a lot of choice in any political matter.

These goals make Stellaris therefore a very political game from its outset, as the game is not conceivable or winnable without the player performing some kinds of political actions.

Dawn of War (I)

Building up from what has been said about the game above, the goals of Dawn of War are associated with domination or rather eradication of the other factions. In order to achieve this, the player's faction needs however to survive the other's attacks first. The goal is achieved by capturing terrain and eventually chasing one's opponents. Seeing that warfare and conflict between different factions in inherently political, so are the game's goal. The player is his army's general and as such makes the decisions that will eventually lead to victory or loss. There is thus a lot of choice with regard to how to win any present conflict or political matter surrounding the game's goal. The player can however not choose to end hostilities and has only limited political *agency* in general. While thus being a game with political goals at its heart, Dawn of War also shows that choice in how to fulfil a goal does not automatically equate with higher levels of *agency* or political efficacy.

Mass Effect

Mass Effect is a series of action role play games with shooter elements, set in the year 2183 in a sci-fi version of our universe where humans have become spacefaring beyond our solar system and have made contact with other species. Vast parts of the galaxy are ruled by a cross-species run governmental body called the 'Citadel Council'. Humanity is the newest and youngest race to join this organisation, which by itself is also a source of tension. The protagonist of the game is 'Commander Shephard', the first human working as 'spectre', a form of agent, for this organisation. The initial task is investigating the suspicious behaviour of another agent. The latter

turns out to be mind-controlled by a third party individual that is part of the 'Reapers', mechanical lifeforms that have a history of committing genocide against any form of sentient life every couple of 50,000 years. The player as Commander Shephard is thus tasked with saving nothing less than all sentient life in the galaxy throughout the initial three games of the series. Before this is accomplished, a lot of sub-goals and decisions have to be achieved and made first, as new allies and alliances have to found. To do this the player generally has two choices: one achieving a goal through diplomatic means, usually requiring a little more work, such as extra missions or the right conversation tree choices; or through using coercion, which is easier to achieve, but usually leaves one of the involved parties unsatisfied. Choices made by the player will also influence possible story outcomes later in the game. The most prominent of these is for example through the end of the game when the player has to make the decision whether to save the current members of the council or not. The player's decision on this will not only influence the council's composition in future titles of the series, but also the standing humans have in it.

On a more abstract level, the game's goal is to progress through the mission and story of the game as well as resource acquisition through gaining allies and make alliances, though the latter could also be argued to be a means to achieve the goal of progress. Furthermore, ways to achieve this overall goal is through exploration of the galaxy, finding solutions to various problems, including inter-species problems and making those in power believe that the Reapers are actually a threat as well as generally finishing missions and quests to increase progress.

Given the story context of these goals, they are also very political as many the decisions made by the player will influence the political situation in the galaxy, e.g. by deciding on the above mentioned future of the council, as well as the general power struggle between current inhabitants of the galaxy and the invading Reapers. The player's role in this is basically nothing short of being the saviour of the galaxy and its political leaders and as such a key

decision maker. As such s/he also has some choice in the political matters of the game through choosing either diplomatic or force-based interventions and deciding who is to survive. While still being limited by predefined options in-game, there is nevertheless an increased level of political agency found for the player in the game and in its goals.

4.4.3.2. Area

The variable *Area* describes what themes and topic areas of politics the game entails. Rather than being on a scale as the above discussed concept of agency, *Area* is an enumeration of different categories of areas. These categories help to describe the 'guise' politics takes in a game. Through this they also help in coming up with overall categories of how politics are used in games as well as categorizing individual games and compare them to others

Examples of areas of politics found in-game are, but not limited to

- Military or defence

- Social issues – including education, health and welfare, economics, which can be further distinguished by their relation to trade and domestic economics

- Justice

- Science and research

- Transport

- Agriculture

- Environment.

In short, if there is a real-world ministry, committee or interest group for something, it has the potential to be viable for a category under *Area* variable.

Area is however not limited to topical concepts. One sub-category of *Area* that is partially already addressed through the kind of political areas and topics that are featured, but can nevertheless also be considered as a category of its own, is the level on which politics happen. In political science, levels of politics traditionally start at the local level, e.g. in the shape of a city council, move up to the national level, e.g. through actions of parliament and national government and finally end on the international level as the highest possible 'level' on which politics can happen. While the latter is usually associated with bi- or multilateral relations between states, it can also describe actions and relationships enacted through international organisation and bodies, e.g. the European Union, as well as individual states and international organisations. Depending on individual national political systems, there can furthermore be additional levels between the local and national stage such as counties, regions and states. These are however less prominently featured in video games based on initial analyses for this framework. In addition to these 'classic' levels of politics, the rise of identity politics has also brought forward the understanding that the personal, i.e. the individual and its social group, can be political stages themselves. These are therefore also aspects worth considering when analysing a game. One level of politics found in games, but not yet in reality is the possibility of having political relations between different planets or star systems. It could thus be argued that 'intergalactic' might be an appropriate addition to the traditional 'levels' tailored towards the special circumstances of game worlds. Concurrently however, individual star-faring factions or planets are often not much different, at least from a games mechanical point of view than cities and nations on an individual world in other games, as the example of *Stellaris* below shows. In order to facilitate comparisons between games, it would thus seem more appropriate to use the international level category in these cases, as they are mechanically the same.

In general, the exact breakdown of categories is up to the individual users and their motivation behind using the framework. However, it should be kept in

mind that too many different fine-grained categories can complicate the ability for quick comparisons between games, but alternatively can also add detail when pursuing a single, in-depth case study.

Finally, the political *Areas* in a game can also influence other variables of the framework. The two most likely candidates for being influenced by the categories found in *Areas* are *Methods* and *Knowledge*. Specific *areas* are likely to favour certain *methods* being employed, e.g. if a game is in the historic setting of the First World War, such as the *Heart of Iron* series, and as such is focused on warfare as a central part of the game, the methods available to the player will also be coloured by this, e.g. lots of military related options as well as domestic production as a method being tailored towards wartime production. At the same time, this is also an example how one theme, (historic) warfare has an influence on other areas in the game, e.g. with the focus on war, social and cultural politics might be less important, i.e. not present, or be influenced and used to achieve certain wartime objectives. *Knowledge* on the other hand is very much limited by the kind of *areas* of politics featured in a game, as gaining knowledge through a game about some that do not exist in the very game is simply not possible.

Examples for Area in games

Dawn of War (I)

Dawn of War is a real-time strategy game, meaning that events are happening as the game goes on contrary to being round based as the above-mentioned Civilization series. It is set in the dark sci-fi universe of the Warhammer 40,000 franchise, in which 'only war' exists. True to this tagline, the main area of politics found in-game is military and aggressive conflict based. It is furthermore set on an international level of politics. While it could be argued whether international or intergalactic might be more suitable as label

categories, the way it plays out in-game is similar to different factions on a single planet, suggesting that referring to it as international politics might be more mechanically appropriate. Any other potential areas, such as research and resource acquisition or production are subordinate to the main goal. Research can only be done in order to build new and improved war machines. Any form of resource gathering and distribution is done to help the war effort and build the machines research was done for. It is thus also an example of how one dominant *Area*, and as such also political *Method* as discussed below, can influence the extent to which other areas can be found in-game.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

As mentioned above, Skyrim is an open-world roleplay game, set in the fantasy province of Skyrim that is in the middle of a civil war stemming from the secession efforts of some the native 'Nord' population. The areas of societal unity and internal or domestic power distribution are thus prominent political themes throughout the game. In more general terms, this is expressed through the fields of military and defence politics in the shape of the two opposing factions. At the same time, one of the main quest lines also offers the chance for a diplomatic solution of the conflict, adding the area of diplomacy to the game. Related to this overarching conflict are also some societal and social issues, such as discrimination and racism between the different races and ethnicities of the game world. There is furthermore the area of justice that features in the game. While the player cannot, apart from main story elements, influence what is considered just in-game, he can be subjected to it through acts of theft or murder. Politics can be found on various levels throughout the game ranging from the national, the empire's internal power struggle to the regional around Skyrim and local, with internal family quarrels of ruling houses and local issues.

Skyrim is thus an example how games can include current and historical political issues and areas, e.g. racism, in fantasy settings and still make aspects of it relevant to today's players. In addition, it shows that a game can

features various areas of politics without making each an explicit mechanism in the game play.

Stellaris

Stellaris is a Sci-Fi grand strategy game. Each player begins in their home star system at a point in time when their civilization has established reliable ways for interstellar travel. The focus of the game play is on exploration of the galaxy as well as expanding one's star empire through colonies and outputs. The process will eventually lead to encounters with other spacefaring nations. Similar to other grand and 4X strategy games, a game is won by meeting certain victory conditions. In Stellaris these are 'domination', owning 40% of inhabitable planets, 'conquest', conquering all opponents, and 'federation' which builds upon the option to build federations with other nations and requires a federation of a certain size for the victory condition to be met.

Given these ways to win the game, warfare and military politics are areas found throughout the game. But as the federation victory shows, violence is not the only way forward and diplomacy is thus equally important. In contrast to the other two examples, concentrated military actions are actually not a necessary element of a game of Stellaris. Apart from these two big opposites, the game also includes several other areas of politics, many of these relate to how a star empire is run. There are the areas of economics and trade, allowing the gathering of enough resources, including food and agricultural aspects, for the continued existence and growth of one's star nation. While trade could be considered a part of general economics, it was decided to separate the two based on the different in-game systems surrounding the two. There are also a variety of social issues included in the game, ranging from citizen's happiness to questions of citizenship and citizen's rights. The latter is especially relevant in the relationship between home planet and colonies as well as any alien population that might find itself in or migrate to one's part of the galaxy. As mentioned above when discussing game play,

exploration and extension of national territory and any political decisions associated with these are also featured areas in the game. This is however also dependent on what decisions a player has made in regards to the area of science and technological as well as what the general ideological positioning of an empire is. The latter is decided during the nation creation process. Decisions made on 'traditions' of a faction during the game add to the overall area of ideology in-game. Finally, Stellaris also features basic aspects of real political processes through the elections of leaders on a regular level.

While the setting would thus suggest that politics in Stellaris happen on intergalactic level, it can also be argued that the label "international" would fit better as it is mechanically the same most of the time. If anything, the term 'supra-national' might fit in case of 'federation to federation' relations. Players can furthermore influence politics on the national, regional – in the shape of sector of space – and local, with planets acting as cities in other games, level through edicts, building programs and other measures. Stellaris is thus an example for games featuring many different areas of politics on a variety of levels and of which the majority of areas are also represented through individual game mechanics. It furthermore shows that games can be used to present the possibilities that can evolve from traditional political idea under fictional futuristic circumstances, resembling the notions also found in design fiction (Hales, 2013).

4.4.3.3.   Method

Methods describes the political methods present in a game. Political methods include any action or activity with which politics can be pursued, or 'done' and with which it is associated. It is not related to (research) methods in political science.

Examples for *Methods* are

- Negotiations

- Policy and law making

- Spending powers

- Resource distribution (such as money, energy or food)

- Use of force through, e.g. the police or military

- Espionage

- Bribery

- Campaigning for a cause

- Publication and signing petitions

- Protesting

- Writing a letter to officials

Understanding the political *Methods* in a game helps to describe and categorize game according to their political content. It is furthermore helpful when comparing game with each other.

Obviously, the depiction of the same method can be rather different between games. This is something to keep in mind when comparing games as well. Additionally, methods in-game are likely to be not exact copies of their real-wold equivalent. The level of abstraction and how this can effect the player, the overall gaming experience and the potential for leaning about politics are also considerations that are linked to the *Methods* variable.

Methods can also influence and be influenced by other variables, most prominently *area* and *Knowledge.* The areas of politics featured in a game will influence the methods available. At the same time, if a game is designed with certain methods to be used in mind, this might also influence the areas they are presented in. Knowledge can only be obtained if something is present in a game. Methods featured will thus limited and influence what knowledge about politics a player can gain from playing a game.

Examples for Method in games

Civilization V

Civilization is an example of games where *areas* found in-game will also influence the kind of *methods* featured and available to the player. Civ features various aspects of both foreign and national politics. Associated with these are a variety of methods the player can make use of to influence these areas.

In the field of foreign politics there are four major methods. The two main ones are the opposites of negotiation, associated with the area of diplomacy, and use of force, through using one's army against an enemy faction, associated with the areas of conflict and defence. Foreign politics in Civilization does however not need to be so 'direct'. Instead players can choose to 'do' politics through the more indirect means of espionage, allowing for information gathering, sabotage or incidents of incitement to riot and bribery.

In regards to national politics the main political methods are the ability to decide on the spending of resources and policy making. The ways players can decide to spend as well as gather resources are quite varied. Resources can be 'gathered' through having citizens work on terrain tiles around one's city as well as through taxation and trade. Spending these resources can be done through building and maintaining buildings and units, through promoting technology research as well as using it in trades with other nations. Policy making is indirectly also related to this as it requires a certain amount of the 'culture' resource in order to enact a 'social policy' or later on in the game an 'ideology'. Both give the player certain advantages in the game play.

While thus featuring a variety of political methods, it should also be questioned how close or correct these are to the real existing methods on which they are modelled. Some abstraction is necessary to make some

concepts useful in-game and not unnecessarily complicate things, e.g. have a tax system that allows for some input by the player is feasible, but recreating a real-world taxation system would not be. While overall not too outlandish, some aspects of Civ's methods seem however only very loosely related to their real-world counterpart. One example for this are social policies and how they affect the player's ability to rule. First of all, the term 'tradition' might be more appropriate as social policies are more associated with government's decisions on certain matters as well as some of the 'social policy' in-game a more related to non-social issues like the military. Second, even if a player enacts all social policies related to 'liberty', such as 'republic', does this not affect the way decisions are made in-game as the players still has very much despotic powers. There is thus a divorce between the meaning of concepts in-game and their meaning in the real political world. This opens up various issues and questions with regards to the *knowledge* found in the game and how reliable information and concepts used in-game can be adopted in non-game settings, except for those texts clearly marked as additional material, to give an historic context to something,

Dawn of War (I)

Dawn of War is a more extreme example how *area* can not only influence the *methods* used, but also how methods in-game can be severely limited by it. This game has only one dominant area, conflict, as such only methods associated with this exist, i.e. the use of force through one's army as well as the power of resource distribution. While it is fairly self-explanatory what the former is used for, the latter is, again, limited to the decision-making process of what new units, buildings and abilities to build in order to further the war effort. Seeing this very limited application of these methods as well as the general futuristic sci-fi setting, there only seems a tangible correlation between the real methods and those found in-game, which again influence the game's *knowledge* potential negatively.

The Sims 4

As described above, politics in the Sims series is one of the many available careers a Sim can take on. As such, the focus is less on political actions in the traditional sense, but indeed is more concerned on one's advancement in the 'career'. The depiction of politics, whether the player chooses to pursue a career as 'career politician' or 'activist', is thus fairly stereotypical and superficial, which also effects the amount and choice of political methods represented in the game.

While the game describes the occupations of each 'stage' of the politics career, the activity of 'doing' the work is rarely shown in-game, as the player is just told that their Sim is now 'at work', at least in the earlier versions of the series. The Sims 4 however also allows working from home and at the earlier stages of the career, when the Sim is still more a campaigner or activists, one of their daily tasks is to convince at least one other Sim per day from their cause or campaign. There are furthermore social action abilities associated with certain levels in the career. These can be used when directly interacting with another Sim in-game in order to gain popularity and new supporters. One of these is policy making, or making the promise of a certain policy, which may or may not be empty. While thus being a political methods in-game, it does not directly relate to the active act of making the policy and enacting. There is furthermore the possibility for the player's Sim to accept bribes for their political campaign. This 'method' can be lucrative but will lead to losing one's career when found out.

As mentioned above, the politics career in the Sims starts with being an activist. As such the methods of campaigning and protesting are available to the player. Political methods in the Sims thus also include examples for informal political activities.

Overall, political methods in the Sims are more focused on the social and public side of politics and do not allow for influencing the actual content of politics and policies, if they are mentioned at all.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented a novel approach to discussing, analysing and creating games with political content and their potential to create political engagement. The Politics in Games framework is a holistic approach to politics in games that aims to be of use for a large group of users, both experts and interested lays. The next steps are now to test the framework for its analytical and generative abilities 'in the wild' and how the framework is used by others. For the first part, several analyses case studies and an online study were held, which will be discussed in the next chapter. This is followed by the discussion of a game design workshop utilising the framework in chapter 6.

5. The Politics in Games framework as an analytical tool

With the framework and its theoretical underpinnings discussed in the previous chapter, it is now time to consider its use and application in regards to the two use cases it was set out to support.

In this chapter, its capability for being used as an analytical tool to locate and discuss politics in (video-) games is investigated. The next chapter will then consider using the framework for generative and creative tasks, focusing on game design.

To test its capability as an analytical tool two different studies are presented. First, the framework's ability to analyse entire games, contrary to individual aspects as found in the examples in the previous chapter, then it will be tested by three different case studies, featuring different types of politics in games and how the framework can cater for the diversity in their material. These case studies are meant to show the framework's ability to analyse games by an 'expert' user with both knowledge of political science and video games. It should be noted that the presented case studies were updated after their initial production, in order to reflex the changes made to the framework throughout the research. The next step in exploring the usability of the framework, was then to test its ability to be a useful analytical tool with users that have not spent significant amounts of time researching the relationship between games and politics, in order make sure of its broader applicability not just between games but also between different groups of people. For this purpose, the framework was turned into an online survey and given to participants to use and apply to a game of their choice. Results from this exercise thus also influenced the version of the framework in the expert case studies as presented in this chapter. The differences between how these two groups use the framework is further investigated afterwards as well as how this influences future work and use of the framework.

5.1. 'Expert' Case Studies

As mentioned above, the following analyses were made in order to test the framework's ability to analyse games when used by an 'expert' with knowledge of both politics and games.

Methodology

The three case study games were chosen based on their diversity in location and kind of politics as well as difference in genres and setting. In addition, their popularity, based on copies sold and being known among gamers, was also a factor when choosing the games. This is to show that politics in games are not limited to games that solely focus on (contemporary-) institutional parliamentary politics but can also be found in popular games from different genres. The three games are *The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim*, *Civilization 5* and *Grand Theft Auto 5*.

The games were analysed using the Politics in Games framework presented in the previous chapter, while also being informed by the general principles of game analysis (Fernández-Vara, 2014). As mentioned above, the analyses went through several re-writes as and when the framework was updated. The presented case studies below are thus made after the general users' made ones discussed in the second half of this chapter. Concurrently, the online analyses influenced the overall framework and thus also the way the expert studies are structured. To appreciate the way the framework developed, it might thus be of interest to read the second half of this chapter before the first.

Knowledge about the individual games stemmed predominantly from having played the game previously myself as well as game play sessions as part of the analysis. Additional information from other sources such as game wikis were used when appropriate and to double check situations and narrative developments.

In order to present a better picture of the overall game for readers not familiar with the games, the decision was made to give a short introduction to the game prior to the main analyses. Given the modularity of the framework, it was further decided to begin the analyses write-ups with variables from Set 2 ('the bigger picture' to give a better overall picture, before going deeper into the political elements of the games. The variables in the framework were used to pin point and describe the politics in the games, allowing for giving context and comparisons with other games as well as real world situations past and present.

5.1.1. The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim

About the game

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is an open-world fantasy role play game developed by Bethesda Game Studios and published by Bethesda Softworks in November 2011. The game was released both for PC and various generations of Sony PlayStation and Microsoft Xbox as well as most recently for the Nintendo Switch and a virtual reality edition. It has sold over 22 million times since its release (Kollar, 2015).

Figure 18 Map of the conflict lines between the civil war parties in Skyrim

The greater picture (set 2 of the framework variables)

Goals

The main quest storyline of Skyrim focuses on the player character learning that they are a 'dragonborn'. Dragonborn are mortals that are blessed by the divines to use the 'thu'um' or storm voice, powerful magical shouts that are learned from absorbing a dragon's soul. The player character thus spends a lot of time exploring the name-giving province of Skyrim in the fantasy world of Tamriel (see figure 18) trying to learn new shouts and killing dragons. The end-goal to this is to be able to fight 'Alduin the World-Eater', an especially powerful dragon prophesised to destroy the world.

However, this being an open-world game the players can choose how intensely they want to pursue this story line during their play through. Instead, players are free to set their own goals and (role-) play and progress their character accordingly. Thus, instead of becoming a famous world-saving dragon hunter, the player may choose to build a house and settle down with

a spouse and children, become a member of one of the prominent guilds (Mages, Thieves and the local version of the Fighters Guild) found in Skyrim, or both or something completely different.

The overarching narrative backdrop to all of this is that the province of Skyrim is in the state of Civil War with troops of the central Imperium fighting the revolting Stormcloaks, a faction of the native populace of Skyrim (see figure 13 for a map of the division of the land between the two factions at the start of the game). The player may choose to join either faction or stay neutral. This will result in different sets of quests that have the end goal of either pacifying and strengthening Skyrim's connection to the Imperium or to liberate it.

Besides the goals, the overall scope of 'politics' in the game is very much focused on the ongoing conflict in Skyrim, though as the player can become aware through exploring and reading of in-game lore texts that these are related to the grander political and power situation in Tamriel itself.

Area

Given the civil war setting, military operations and defence politics have a prominent position in Skyrim. There is however also the option to stop the civil war when staying neutral as a player and thus giving importance to the area of diplomacy.

Related to and feeding into the civil war are also the areas of regional and ethical identity as well as religion, that lead to political action. Part of the above-mentioned peace treaty forbids the worship of Talos, a mortal who ascended to godhood who is particularly revered by the Nords. This however leads to a strengthening of the regional and ethnic identity as it is perceived as a sanction aimed particularly against Nords. As a result, the player may encounter some Nords that are not particularly friendly towards foreigners or non-Nord inhabitants of Skyrim. This is however not a universal attitude, as

equally many Nords speak out in favour of being more open and Imperium supportive due to the benefits of trade and military protection. There is thus an element of identity and group politics in the game.

There is furthermore the possibility that the player becomes part of the justice system in the game world. This can either happen through becoming a bounty hunter for a local authority or guild or opposite to this, becoming a criminal when stealing or killing marks as an assassin.

From a level perspective, the main level of politics in Skyrim is thus on a regional level of the province Skyrim itself. The two main opposing factions are the Imperial army and its supporters as well as the Stormcloaks, led by Jarl Ulfric Stormcloak. The civil war between these two groups is however a product of the bigger international and national situation, stemming from the previous war between the human-dominated Imperium and the elven led Aldmeri Dominium and the treaty conditions ending the war. As such there is also the group of 'Thalmor' inquisitors from the Aldmeri Dominium controlling the upholding of the treaty conditions in Skyrim and as such represent the interest of a third, international faction in the region.

Each region of Skyrim has furthermore its own political and power sphere centring on the region's 'Jarl', a position similar to a king or lord. The player may decide to help the local jarls or contribute to their abdication and replacement.

Methods

Similar to the area of politics found in Skyrim, the main political 'method' featuring in the game is the use of force, either between the two rivalling factions or when the player character is following their own agenda.

'Brute force' and intimidation are however not the only ways a particular goal can be reached. Thus, the game also allows the players to use their talent of speech to negotiate and persuade others. This happens both in the larger story arches such as the civil war, where a neutral player can become a

mediator between the two factions (see figure 14) as well as in smaller quests and random encounters. 'Speech' itself is an ability that the players can train to improve their persuasion abilities.

Finally, some quests and situations allow for use of espionage and bribery. For example, when being asked to check on somebody else's whereabouts and possessions, being a potential informant for the warring factions, conversing with non-player characters or if being caught by the town guard when stealing items.

Figure 19 Peace negotiations between the civil war parties in Skyrim

Elements for political engagement (set 1 of the framework variables)

Agency

It seems appropriate to describe the player's ability to shape politics in Skyrim as 'can influence major decisions'. This is especially true for any choices regarding the civil war factions, as the conflict itself will not progress in-game as long as the player does not make a decision and the faction supported will eventually be the victorious one, adding to the 'specialness' or 'chosen one' characteristic of the player character. The situation of the civil war and many other decisions made will also alter the 'face' of Skyrim, as e.g. expelled or

unseated rulers can be replaced and most non-player characters once dead, will not come back.

The player's character's role in all of this is diverse and changes throughout the game and given situation. Characters start the game as prisoners of the Imperium, but eventually can become regional or nation-wide heroes. They can choose to join a guild and work their way from outsider to subordinate to one of the leading personalities in the organisation. They can choose to become invaders, defenders or negotiators (figure 19). Given the open-world nature of the game, choices made through-out the game are as much the player's as they are the Dragonborn's as the latter behaves in the way the former chooses, within the limits of the game and dialogue option.

Form

Politics in Skyrim are mostly of institutional nature, though organised in a rather feudal way considering the existence of Jarls and their holds as well as the Imperium. One might argue that the rebellion could be an informal way of making one's voice heard, though this heavily depends on one's definition of 'informal' politics. Finally, the notion of ethnicity as identity politics has both institutional elements, through the organised rebellion, and informal, through personal identity politics and group identity and dynamics.

Knowledge

Politics, especially the power struggle between the two civil war parties in the eponymous province of Skyrim, are an important aspect to parts of the narrative and world design of the game as discussed above. As such a lot of political knowledge found in the game is introduced through the narrative by way of different means ranging from quests, in-game books to background NPC conversations.

The way political knowledge is framed however, is focused towards the goal of explaining reasons behind different parties' actions and the overall

situation in Skyrim. Thus having primarily a world building agenda, rather than aiming to educate the player about politics.

This is also visible through the way certain elements of the workings of the political system of Skyrim and the wider world are dealt with. The province of Skyrim resembles in many ways a Feudal society, but in no way is this ever explicitly explained, neither how the system works and what individual titles of office mean, apart from the general fact that Skyrim belongs to the Imperium and is in danger of seceding. To understand this further, the player thus either needs to have external political or historical knowledge and/or experience from previous games in the Elder Scrolls series. There is thus no effort made to connect events and knowledge from the in-game to the real world, seeing that 'Tamriel' is supposed to be fantasy world. While thus a politically educated player might see similarities between the two, e.g. in the themes nationalism or racism, the game frames both as unrelated entities.

Furthermore, being an open-world game, the player can choose to what degree they want to interact with the 'political knowledge' aspect of the game. The experience can thus vary tremendously, ranging from little knowledge experienced due to lack of particular quests done, to intense involvement with the world's lore and political situation through quests and additional objects found in-game such as maps or books giving more in-depth knowledge about the setting, its past and present.

All in all, politics in Skyrim are an important element to the backstory and narrative of the game. While the former cannot be changed, the latter can be shaped by the player to some degree. Politics can also be found in the game mechanics, e.g. invading the enemy lands, though these are more products of the narrative rather than being stand-alone game mechanics in their own right.

5.1.2. Civilization 5

About the game:

Civilization V is the 5th title in the Civilization series developed by Sid Meiers and Firaxis Games and published by 2K Games in 2010. The game is available for Window, Mac and Linux computers. It is a '4X' turn-based strategy. '4X' refers to "eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, and eXterminate", four of the main 'activities' of game play (Gunn et al., 2009). It sold over 10 million copies, making it one of the best-selling computer exclusive games available (Leack, 2017)

The player takes on the role of the ruler of a nation. These nations and the name, gender and appearance of rulers are taken from historical figures from said nations, though it is also possible to set up one's own personalised leader of a nation. As rulers the players lead their nation across time, progressing through different historical periods from ancient times to present, while being constantly in competition with other nations. Advancing as a nation happens through researching new technologies and establishing new cities, which in turn allow for additional resources acquisition and production as well as more citizens. The main focus of the game is the world map, alternating with specialised menus and views such as an individual 'city screen' for each city or diplomacy overview (see figure 20).

Figure 20 A typical world map view in Civilization

The greater picture and scope (set 2 of the framework variables)

Goal

While there are official 'victory conditions' which can be seen as the end goals of the game, the game does not prescribe a particular playing style and players' can come up with their own personal goals. In general, the main goal would probably be the 'progress' of one's nation as mentioned above. What form this progression takes is up to the individual player, but should in one way or another allow for the continued survival of one's civilisation. In so far it seems appropriate to say that the game focuses on the player's goals rather than the player's character's rules, as individual heads of nations are mostly graphical present with some nation-specific bonuses. The only exception of this are arguably the scenario settings found in the game that reproduce certain historical settings.

The victory conditions are 'domination', 'science', 'cultural', 'diplomatic' and 'time'. Victory conditions, and thus the set goals by the games, are all equal, thus achieving any of these five will enable the player to win the game.

Winning by 'domination' does not mean having to conquer all of the world map or eliminating all other parties in the game, but instead focuses on capturing all original capital cities. The 'science' victory is gained when the player is the first to successfully launch a space ship. This requires reaching the end of the tech tree as well as building the individual parts of the space ship along with the 'Apollo Programme', a unique construction. "Cultural" victory is associated with being culturally influential over other civilisations. "Culture" is should be noted, is a resource in the game that can be 'produced' by certain buildings in one's cities that is then used to learn new social policies. A 'diplomatic' victory is gained when the players become the head of the 'United Nations' as per election from the majority of other nations. Finally, if none of the above are happening, the 'time' victory is won by the player who has the highest civilization score in 2050 or after 500 game rounds. Individual victory conditions can be disabled when setting-up the game. Victory is thus much dependent on the acquisition and management of resources, dominating in at least one area, thus becoming the best in it, making progress towards something the player is free to choose and finally the survival of one's civilisation. This is achieved by capturing land and resources, constructing projects and exploring the world map. Thus overall, the goals of the game can be categorised as 'domination' and 'being the best' in different ways and shapes.

Finally, winning the game does not have to mean the end of the game as players can choose to continue playing even after a victory condition is met.

The overall scope and variety of politics found in Civilization V is thus quite large and many are tied into the mechanics and win-conditions as well. This last but not least is also expressed through its focus on resource acquisition and distribution, which in itself is what modern political science considers to be the essence of politics.

There are a lot of different areas of politics found in the game. One of the most dominant areas, depending on one's playing style of course, is the military/defence sector. Related to this is also the sphere of diplomacy, which is not only used to prevent the need for military action, but also to negotiate alliances and trade agreements with other nations. While these are all more on the international level, there are also various areas of politics touched upon on the domestic level. These include various aspects of social policies through the notions of health, happiness and cultures, though these are fairly abstract and simplistic, being used as resources and factors affecting production. 'Culture' as a resource is also used to learn more 'social policies'. These social policies are loosely based on real-world (political) concepts and school of thoughts: tradition, liberty, honour, piety, patronage, rationalism, exploration, commerce and aesthetics. At a later point in the game, the player has furthermore the possibility to adopt different ideologies. Different policies give different benefits in the game and may also, similar to the concept of 'religion' found in the game, influence other nation's attitudes towards the player. Finally, it can also be argued that science and transport politics are represented in the game too. The former, due to the ability to choose and promote scientific research by the player, the latter by the ability to build transport routes that costs maintenance, but also allow for certain bonuses such as faster unit movement.

From a level perspective, Political elements can be found on various levels in Civilization, right from the international sphere to the local level. There are dealings with other nations and even an in-game 'United Nations' which reflects aspects of real-world international relations. Then there is the national level on which the player decides on research, social policies, troop movement and other things. Finally, there is also the city screen level, which represents local politics. This is mostly focused on production and resource management, but also includes aspects of citizen's happiness, health and

desires, which have direct impact on production as unhappy citizens will revolt.

Methods

Just like the areas of politics in Civilization, many of the political methods are found primarily embedded into the game mechanics. The players have a variety of methods at their disposal to enforce their interests and interact with other nations. This can either happen through use of military power or negotiations, either bilateral or through the global institution of the 'United Nations'. It is further possible to use bribery, in the form of a monetary gift, e.g. to improve another nation's leader's opinion on one's nation. If certain technologies are researched it is furthermore possible to launch covert operations against other nations. These can range from receiving general information about an opponent's resources to starting a riot in one of their cities. On the domestic front, there is the above mentioned ability to make social policies (see figure 21) as well as general resource distribution within one's nation.

Overall, political methods and decisions make up a lot of content and player actions in the game. These are however, not always realistic and most often very simplified due to the limitations of the game, thus at worst being related to real-life political methods only in name and basic concept.

All aspects of the second variable set about politics in the game are very much part of the game mechanics rather than being narrative based. This is also due to the game, historical scenarios notwithstanding, not having any prescribed narrative other than 'there are different civilizations, they grow or perish, they may or may not interact with one another'. Instead, the game's narrative is emerging.

Figure 21 Social policy screen in Civilization 5

Elements for political engagement (set 1 of the framework variables)

Agency

In regard to being able to influence politics as well as general progress in the game, the player is given a high level of freedom and decision-making ability. The only real limitations are the availability of resources in one's civilization as well as the environment, i.e. the AI and random events. The player has the ability to potentially influence the game's outcome with every single action they are taking. It thus seems appropriate to categorize the player's ability as 'can do anything within the boundaries of the game mechanics' as this agency goes beyond being able to make major decisions.

Form

Politics in Civilization is of an institutional, top-down nature. The player is the leader of a nation and decides on the future of its citizens. The citizens of an individual city may demand certain goods, but fulfilling these wishes will only grant a resource bonus and not doing so has no negative repercussions. Similarly, there is no parliament or other state-run body that may limit the decision making of the ruler. The only real limiting factors in the game are resources and other civilisations. As such the player is very much in the position of an absolute ruler. This seems a little odd considering that one of

the social policies that can be followed is 'liberty' and as part of this also the notion of 'republic'. Would the player then be an elected dictator? The game does not give an answer to this, nor is it portrayed as problematic and thus not in tune with reality's notions of the concepts.

Knowledge

Knowledge about politics can be found throughout the game, in a direct, indirect and value-based way.

One direct, formal way of including knowledge about politics is the 'civiliopedia' that has been an element in the Civilization games throughout the series. Here most game and political elements found in the game are explained, both from a game specific view, what something does or means in the game world, e.g. a special ability of a building, but is also put in historic context and explained based on real-world situations. At no point however is the player forced to use the Civiliopedia. Players also encounter historic figures and situations through the overall game play and its mechanisms. Each head of a civilization is a historic figure and in addition to the general game-play players can choose to play through a scenario based on real historic situations, often presented with an introduction and historical overview.

Indirectly, the player can also learn a lot about politics by just interacting with the game. Political concepts such as resource distribution, warfare, elections or law and policy making are important aspects in the game, that are also all represented in the overall mechanics.

The Civilization game series has been one of the more prominent examples of (academic) critique of games having a Western biased even though it is presented in a neutral way due to the inherent views and believes from its developers (Squire, 2006). As such political values are also present in the game and colour the gaming experience. In addition, elements of ideologies are also part of the game mechanics, though the differences are expressed more through the different effects on the game they cause.

Overall, Civilization is a very political games which has most of its 'politics' build into the game mechanics and potentially also into the emerging gameplay and narrative. Even if players do not actively seek out knowledge about concepts through the Civiopedia, they will still learn something about history and politics by simply interacting and playing the game.

5.1.3. Grand Theft Auto 5

About the game

Grand Theft Auto (GTA) 5 is an open-world action adventure game. It was originally published by Rockstar Games in 2013 and is available on Playstation, Microsoft Xbox and PC. The game is set in an alternative universe version of present-day Southern California named 'San Andreas'. The player is put in the position of three low-lives, doing various heist and operations. The game has sold over 110 million copies across all three platforms, making it the third best-selling video games of all times (Valentine, 2019).

The greater picture (set 2 of the framework variables)

Goals

GTA5 has an overall narrative campaign that players follow through various missions. The main goal of the game is thus progress. Apart from this, and given that it is an open-world game, players are however free to create their own goals and anything the engine behind the world building allow, e.g. focus on making as much money as possible through side missions(resource acquisition), exploring the world through a variety of vehicles and other things.

Area

Given the games protagonists and the fact that the story progresses through various heist scenarios, crime and justice are two of the main areas of politics on which the game touches. There is furthermore commentary on (stereotyped) social economic situations of people from different backgrounds and ethnicities.

From the 'political levels' points of view, there are two levels portrayed in the game. On the one hand there is the national level with the ongoing elections in the background to the game as well as the involvement of two government agencies that try to play each other out and involve the protagonists in the process. On the other, there is the local level which is expressed through the radio talk shows.

Methods

The two main political methods found in GTA 5 are through 'use of force', both as used by the player characters as well as the law enforcement officers. They are almost two sides of the same coin from this point of view: one uses force for criminal purposes, e.g. stealing a car as a means of transportation (see figure 22), the others using the force of law to counter the player characters.

Related is also the method of 'coercion' as a mixture of use of force and bribery that can be found through the corrupt federal agents that try to use the protagonists for their own ends. Corruption and bribery, partly through force, are thus also methods featured in the game.

Finally, there is also the method of campaigning in the shape of the ongoing electoral campaign, though this is mostly confined to the background of the game and is nothing the player actively works towards.

Figure 22 Use of Force' - stealing a car is a common occurrence in GTA 5

Elements for political engagement (set 1 of the framework variables)

Agency

As mentioned above, the game is set in an open-world, thus allowing players a higher level of freedom of interacting with the game world than found in other game types. This freedom does however not translate into the political aspects of the game or how the main story turns out for that matter. The election campaign running in the background cannot be influenced by the

player nor do players learn about the outcome of the elections through the game.

Similarly, the player characters' interaction with members of the federal security and information agencies in the game are also scripted and cannot be controlled by the player. The only aspects in regards to interacting with any part of the state institutions that the player can influence is how and whether they want to get into conflict with the law in the shape of the police through their actions, e.g. shooting someone in the open or driving recklessly.

It thus seems appropriate to describe the agency GTA 5 gives the player as minimal (political) agency, if at all.

Form

The player characters encounter both institutional and informal aspects of politics through the game. The institutional aspects include confrontations with the law and police as well as the ongoing election campaign going on in the background of the game's world. A more informal aspect is the underlying social commentary that is built into the setting as well as the story of GTA 5. While some of this can be considered satire, it does not outright say so, thus needing a level of awareness to see it. Finally, there are the interactions with the agents of the federal investigation bureau protagonists encounter. While technically representative of the institutional side of politics, their methods are in the grey side of legality if at all, thus being equally a case of informal politics in the alternative, more shady meaning of word.

Knowledge

The world of GTA is based on present day America, hence a lot of what is portrayed is loosely based on it as well. It would however be dangerous to say that players will automatically learn something about real politics and real-life situations when playing the game. Instead, they can learn something about the political world of the game world. As mentioned before, there is an election campaign happening in the background, visible through visuals but also addressed in the radio talk shows players can turn on when driving around the game world (see figure 22 for the in-game radio interface). The shows, apart the campaign aspects, are a social-political commentary in themselves and thus also potential sources of political knowledge and awareness.

Another minor element of 'knowledge' featured in the game are embedded values, most prominently in regards to justice and legality, e.g. when causing too much destruction the law (i.e. police) will come after you. However, it is

questionable how much of this players will really take in and follow, consider that the player characters are all criminals and a big part of the game is about doing illegal things and getting away with it. There is thus no clear 'value' message in the game, or rather the values presented and pursued are questionable to say the least.

Politics in GTA 5 are thus overall more elements in the background and effects from player's interactions with the game. While it does not directly educate players about politics in the real world, nor is it particularly objective or always accurate, the social commentary build into the world is nevertheless interesting.
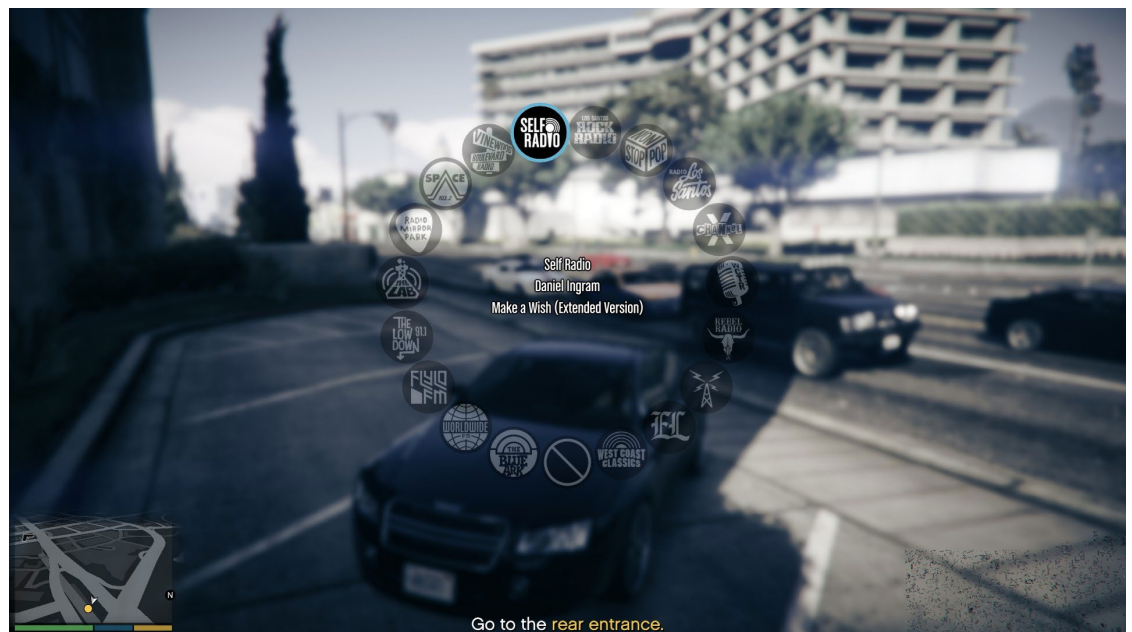
Figure 23 Politics in the background - radio talks shows in GTA 5

5.1.4. Reflections on the analyses

The case studies show that the framework indeed presents a structured approach to identify and analyse the political content of a (video-) game. While significant knowledge in the areas of both politics and video games might not make it necessary to use a framework when analysing political content, it was found that it nevertheless provides a good guiding structure and ascertains that any important elements will not be forgotten or omitted in the process. In addition, it also serves as a platform to enable reflection about the thematic in general.

When reviewing the original case studies and updating them to be in accordance with the current – as presented in chapter 4 – version of the

framework certain differences to the earlier version, which the online survey was based on, became obvious. The older version is monolithic, with a fixed horizontal process associated with it that goes through different stages. It initially focuses on game design elements and then moves on to political ones. The current version of the framework on the other hand is modular, offering different variables and concepts sets that can be used or disregarded, as desired and appropriate, depending on the objective for using the framework. Its focus is more on politics rather than game design, with special emphasis on elements that create political engagement. Something that did not receive a lot of attention in the previous version, that however is of importance for the overall thesis and its research questions with the focus on considering how games can promote and create political engagement. The new version is thus more specialised than the old one. While writing the case studies showed that the new framework's enumeration of variable sets might not be helpful in regards to structuring the write-up of a political content analysis – variable set 1 on political engagement was put after set 2's general description of game and political elements – it's modular structure makes it possible to move analysis elements around as needed for each individual analysis and game. It has thus also a greater level of flexibility. While it can be argued that the more comprehensive approach of the old version might be better for individuals with little to no understanding of politics in games as it allows for a step-by-step process, its fixed and static nature can also become a problem, as found out from the survey, as discussed below. Instead it seems advised to initially consider the game elements, e.g. through a separate framework or taxonomy, and then move on to the framework's current form. This approach was successfully applied during the workshops discussed in chapter 6, when the framework was paired with a structured game design elements overview that was especially put together for the workshop.

Reflecting on the process and experience of analysing the three games several additional observations can be made.

First, it was possible to analyse the three games through the framework and it helped to structure the overall analysis process. The games are quite different in regards to genres – action adventure, RPG and strategy – as well as setting, which ranged from historical to present to fantasy. Politics was more (*Civilization 5*) or less (*GTA5*) dominant in the game, and some of it could be found in the narrative (*Skyrim*), while others was connected to the game mechanics (*Civilization 5*). The framework generally works for all these kinds of games, which speaks for its breath and applicability. It is also a first indicator of how universal it might be, but this would need further use and analyses of different games to prove.

The case studies also bought several similarities between these different games to attention. There is for examples the overlapping prevalence of 'use

of force' methods and elements that are in the military- or armed conflicted area of politics. The way they are embedded in the games is different – gun crimes vs. commanding armies vs. single hero that influences the outcome of a greater conflict – thus highlighting the different shapes the same methods and areas can take between different games. Furthermore, given the large number of games featuring different variations of (armed-) conflict (Power, 2009), it seems likely that this is one of the most common kinds and areas of politics found in games. Greater number of analyses would however be needed to further investigate this notion.

Furthermore, even though politics can be found in different and similar ways across the three games, they are not necessarily 'game making' or 'game breaking' in any of the cases. Especially in Skyrim and GTA5, ignoring the political aspects of the games does not alter the overall experience drastically. Civilization 5 can also be played in a way that considers political concepts as part of the game mechanics, simply giving different modifications to available resources. It is thus not necessary to know about or understand the politics featured in the games to play them. They do however help to deepen immersion and understanding of the game, e.g. the administrative and power structures leading to the civil war in Skyrim. In Civilization understanding the politics behind the game mechanics also makes interactions with other factions and internal process much clearer, foreseeable and better to plan for. Politics and knowledge about it thus add an additional layer to the games rather than being the core to them.

All three games also have underlying (political) values embedded in them. While the values themselves are different and at times, as is the case with GTA5, questionable, they are nevertheless prevalent. Again, more analyses would be necessary to consider whether this is a wider trend in (current) games.

There are also several additional general observations on politics in games that can be made from the case studies. First, and based on the example cases, there seems to be a relationship between how much agency a game gives the player in political terms concurrent with the prominence of politics in a game. GTA5 is not giving the player much political agency at all and politics is more in the background of the game, this is however quite different in Skyrim and Civilization. There are probably games were politics are prominent, but the player has less agency over it, thus further tests and analyses are necessary to further inquire in this direction.

Games can also involve several layers of politics. On the surface there is a 'need to know' level of politics and political knowledge, which represents the minimum of politics players have to understand or be aware of to play and understand the game in its wider context. These is for example the fact that there are different factions, that are at war with each other, in Skyrim or the

notion of (diplomatic-) relations with other nations in Civilization. Further below this is a level of more in-depth knowledge that is available on demand to the player, e.g. through the Civiliopedia or in-game books in Skyrim. These help and further players' understanding beyond the minimum of what is 'necessary' to follow the game's story and process, but allows the player to access it on their own time and terms.

Similarly, politics or at least aspects of it based upon the three case studies, are frequently found in the background or build the backdrop to a game. This leads to the question how likely players will recognise them as such and whether this matters in regards to any learning and engagement effects. This is an important consideration that should be followed-up through future work.

Related to this, is also a distinction that was prominent when comparing the case studies, but was not originally a focus of the framework: the question of whether politics in a game can be found in the narrative or in the mechanics of a game. While this should not have an effect on the overall 'engagement effect' a game may have, it is nevertheless an interesting point to further distinguish and categorise politics in games.

Moving on to further observations related to the framework, these case studies also opened up the question of how well does one need to know a game to use the framework. While all the case study games were familiar to different extents by having played the game, it does not seem impossible to gain the same level of in-sight through alternative sources such as videos or reviews, which were also used to double check game elements for the case studies. However, a more in-depth delve into the game subject matters seems necessary overall.

Furthermore, there is the issue of numerations of the two variable sets in the framework. As the case studies have shown, it is more realistic to use set 2 first in order to gain a better picture of the game at hand and then consider its engaging elements. The original numbers of the framework sets are informed by the initial focus of this work, having the promotion of political engagement as primary target, with the overall analysis of politics in games a secondary concern. Future iterations of the framework should however consider this and change it accordingly.

Finally, the case of Skyrim acts as a reminder that not all games are set in a present-day or historic context. Instead, fantastic or futuristic settings are also common. While it could be argued that these might allow for different political situations and systems and thus should be considered different from other cases, it seems more appropriate to use the same system for analysis with them as the application of politics as they are known today is of interest, rather than any future or alternative universal version of them. Nevertheless,

mentioning the overall setting of a game can help to further categorise and compare games and thus is recommend for analyses purposes in general.

As mentioned above, the reflections and case studies make the need for further analyses of other games by other individuals obvious. This will be done in the following section, when putting the framework in shape of a survey in front of a mixed sample of non-experts.

5.2. Framework analyses by non-experts – a survey study

Coming back to the original notion of having a framework that allows a variety of stakeholders to analyse and talk about politics in games through a common language, it is now time to consider and test if the framework would work equally well for individuals without any specific prior understanding of the interplay between politics and video games.

To this end a survey study was designed to test the Politics in Games framework with others. In addition to seeing whether the framework itself would function and be usable by others, the study had several other objectives. There was on the one hand an interest to see whether the framework could produce repeatable results and analyses by different people, analysing the same game. On the other hand, it was also a way to consider whether any major elements – both from a game as well as politics angle – might have been overlooked and neglected during the development process as well as to check which elements would be particularly prominent among users and their chosen games.

In the overall development of the framework, this study is thus a crucial mid-point. It took place prior to the update of the expert case studies presented above and as such as some impact into their structure and content.

5.2.1. Methodology

The study was delivered through an online survey with four distinctive parts. The main body of the survey was based on the framework, but worded into questions instead of variables. This was done in order to make the study more accessible for participants with little knowledge about politics. Given that the framework itself was slightly modified as a result of this and other work, the

focus of the framework questions was slightly different in this survey than it is in the version of the framework presented in the previous chapter.

The questionnaire was thus based on the initial set-up of the framework and approach to analysing politics in games in general. Here the initial step was to consider what the game in question was about, e.g. including its narrative, genre or setting. The second step was to locate the political elements in the game such as political issues or methods. This led to a further consideration of what area the politics in-game would fall into. Finally, the implementation of politics in the game would be discussed, including how it fits in the overall game design, mechanics and narrative. There was thus, contrary to the current, above presented framework, more of an emphasis on the game and its politics, rather than the game's potential to have a positive effect on player's political engagement. It was more a precursor in the development of the framework. Given the time when the questionnaire was developed, it adhered to the earlier set-up, translating it into different sections and where necessary, sub-sections.

When starting to answer the survey, participants were asked to choose a video game of their choice, with the only requisite being that they would have some familiarity with the game in order to answer some questions about it.

Analogue to the original first step of the framework, the first part of the survey dealt with formal elements of a game and participants were asked to describe the genre, primary game mechanics and interactions, the game goal's and how these are achieved. Answers were given by choosing the appropriate details from a variety of tick boxes. Participants were free to choose more than one option in their answer. Deepening this description, the next part of the questionnaire inquired about the dramatic elements of the game, such as types of narrative, setting and the player character's role in it as well as whether the player can influence the overall course of the game and its story as well as what participants thought the game was about in their own words. The third game-focused part of the survey considered, just like the second and third steps in the then analysis-approach, any political elements that might be found in the game, including different forms of politics that featured, whether these were implemented in the story or the game mechanics, or both; whether the politics in the game could be influenced by the player and if the player character would hold any kind of political position in the game. In addition, participants were also asked whether they thought that the portrayal of politics in the game was realistic and if there could be any other aspects of politics, e.g. specific values or ideology, that might not be covered in the survey. The clear definition of and focus on a specific political issue was thus put aside for a greater general understanding of the politics in the game as it was believed, as later iterations

of the framework also show, that concepts such a area and methods are sufficient and more universal in describing political issues in games.

The final part of the survey asked about participants' demographics , their gaming habits and their interest in politics as well as their assessment of people's ability to influence the politics in their country, whether they thought politicians care about people like them and if they had voted in the most recent national elections. This data had nothing to do with the framework as it was then, but was collected in order to have a better understanding of the sample population of participants as well as the putting of answers into context and also the facilitation a comparison with the previous survey study in chapter 3.

For a full copy of the questionnaire, please see the thesis appendix.

Participants were recruited through social media and other internet outlets such as message boards and had to be at least 18 years old in order to participate.

5.2.2. Results

136 individual game analyses were collected through the survey, describing a total of 95 different games. Thus, while most games only were mentioned once or twice, several titles were used more often.

The most often individually used game was 'The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim', which was chosen 9 times, this is followed by Civilization V that was used 7 times and the Witcher 3 with 5 mentions. For a listing based on game series please see further below in the result section. In addition, for a complete list of all games please see the thesis appendix.

Participants

Before giving a quick overview over the average way games were categorised, a mention of participants and their political views seems in order, to provide better understanding of what potentially informed their choices during the questionnaire as well as allowing for comparisons with participants in the previous landscaping study discussed in chapter 3.

89, or 65.4% of participants were male, 38, or 27.9% were female, 7 preferred another gender identity and 2 did not choose to disclose it. Their age ranged from 18 to 47 years old, with an average of 25.24 years. Participants came from 24 different countries, with the five most common ones being the US with 51 individuals, or 37.5%, the UK with 38 participants, or 27.9%, Germany

with 9 individuals or 6.6 and France and Switzerland with both 6 participants or 4.4% each. The majority of them, 79 or 58.1%, were at least educated to degree level, contrary to only 15 or 11%, who did not. 42 or 30.9% of them were current students. When asked about their gaming habits, almost 40% of participants (53 / 39%) said they would play games on daily basis. The same number of individuals (53 / 39%) said they would do so at least several times a week. Another 13 or 9.6% said they would game at least weekly, whereas just above 10% said would do so less often (see figure 24).
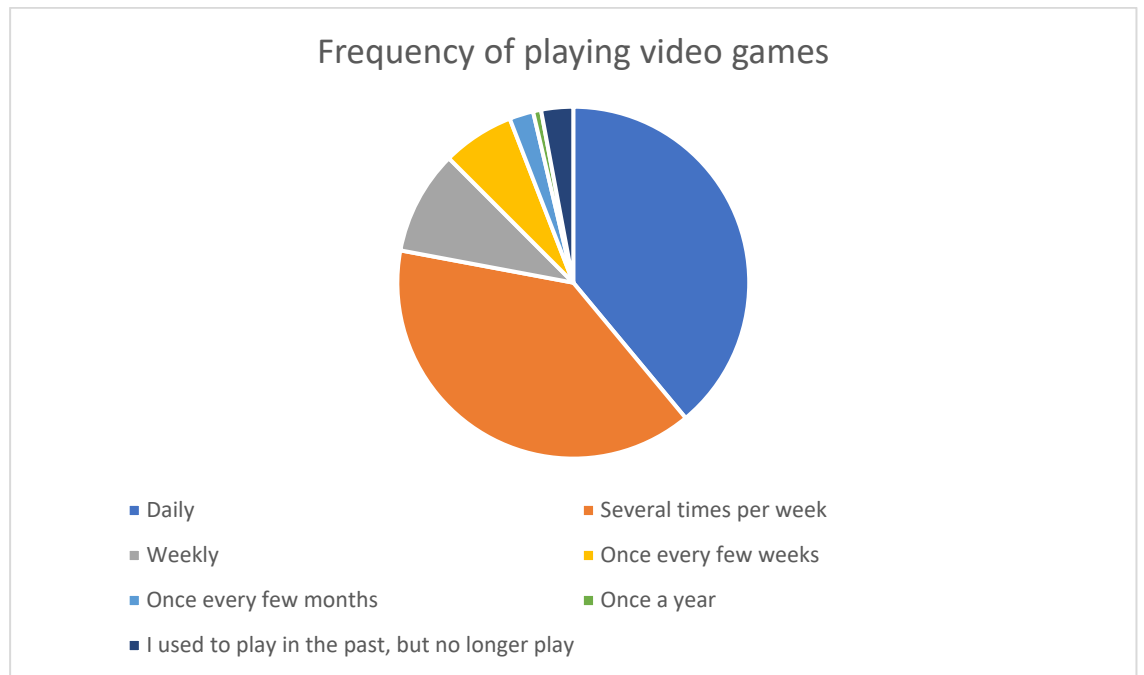
Figure 24 Frequency of participants playing video games

Participants were generally interested in politics, with a mean of 7.74 when asked to rate their interest between 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much). See figure 25 for more detailed numbers.
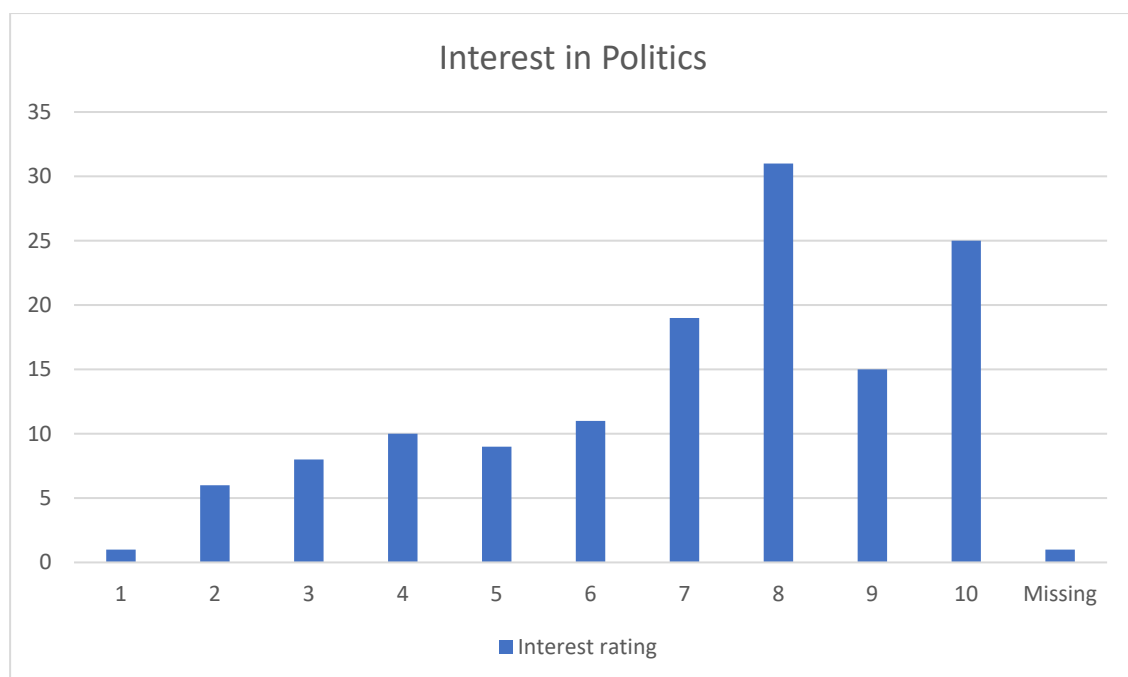
Figure 25 How interested in politics are you on a scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Very much)?

However, when asked whether the political system in their country would allow people to have an influence on politics, participants' response was more serious, coming up to an average of 5.43 on the '1/not at all' to '10/very much' scale (see figure 21). This tendency got even more pronounced when being asked if politicians would care about people like them, which had a pronounced negative opinion with an average of 3.9 and only one participant believing that politicians would care 'very much'/10 (see figure 26).
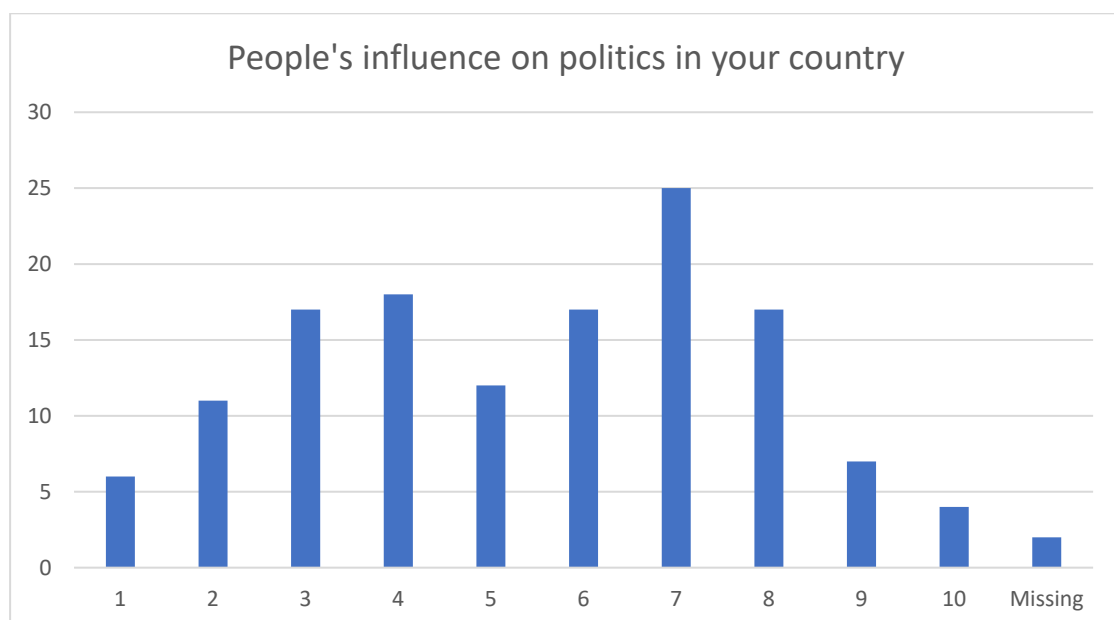
Figure 26 How much would you say that the political system in your country allows people like you to have an influence on politics?
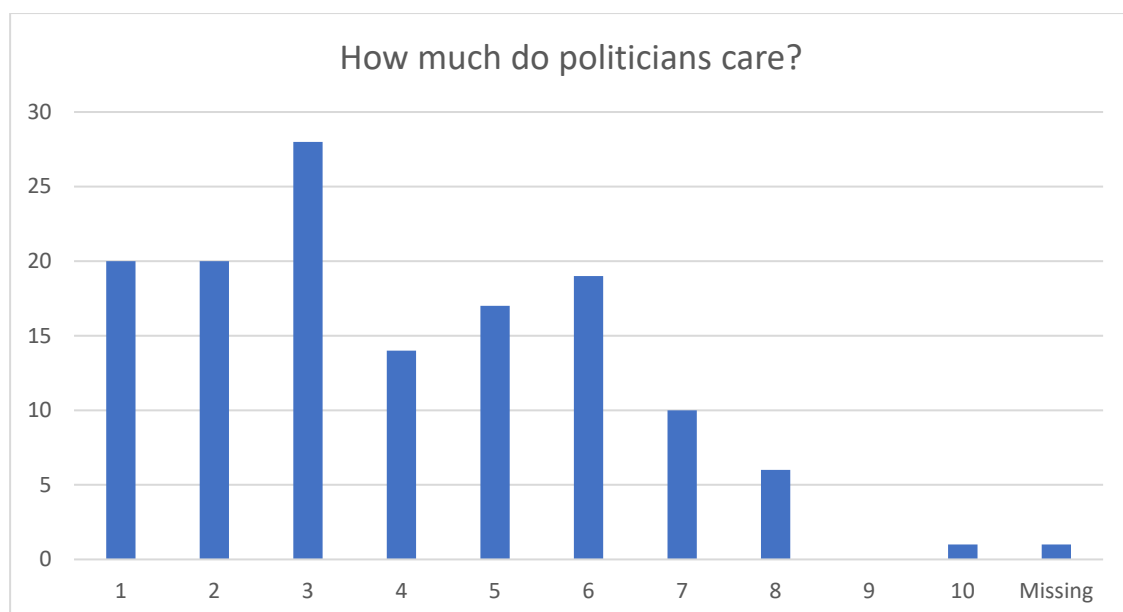
Figure 27 How much would you say that politicians care what people like you think?

Beside this negative perception, the majority (66.2%) of participants nevertheless votes in the last national election and thus participated in the political process, regardless of how much they believed to be able to influence (figure 28).
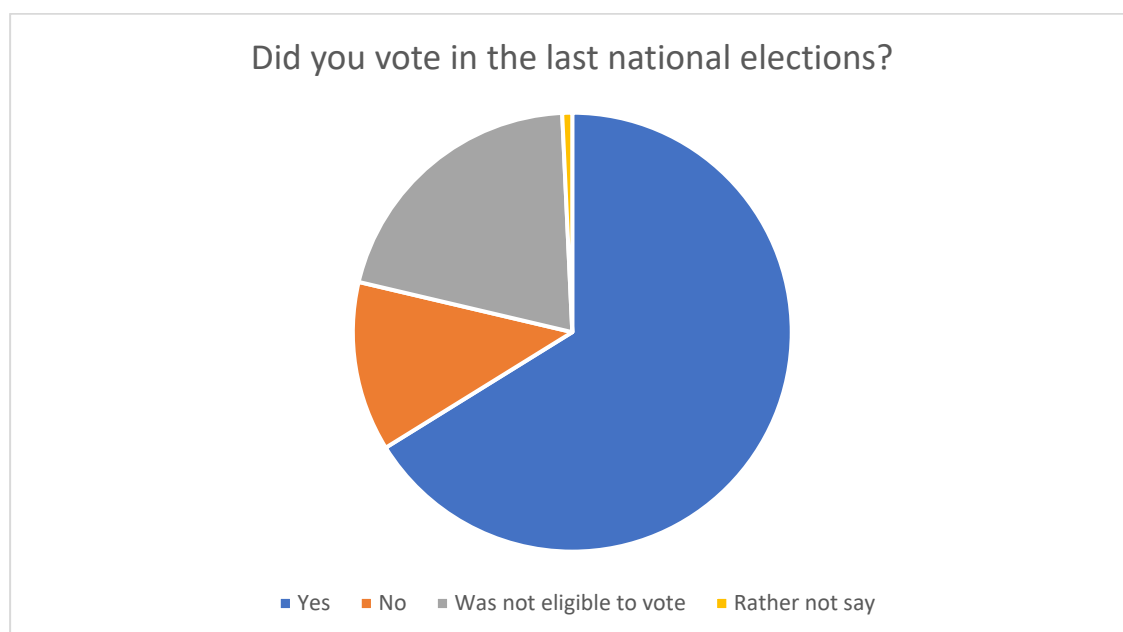
Figure 28 Did you vote in the last national election in your country?

Games

The following is a quick overview of the type of games used by participants.

As mention above, The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim was the most frequently chosen individual title, followed by The Witcher 3 and several others that were

mentioned three or less times. When it comes to game series, which was considered and put together by myself based on participants' responses, this listing changes slightly. Here Civilization is equally often mentioned than the Elder Scrolls and series with many similar, but different in details games such as Pokémon are more numerously represented (see table 22).

Individual Game	Frequency	Game series	Frequency
The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim	9	Civilization	10
Civilization V	7	Elder Scrolls	10
The Witcher 3	5	Mass Effect	6
Fallout 4	3	Pokémon	6
Fallout: New Vegas	3	Fallout	6
Mass Effect	3	The Sims	4
Life is Strange	3	Zelda	2
The Sims	3	Dragon Age	2
World of Warcraft	3	Sim City	2

Table 22 Most popular individual games and game series in the survey

The most popular genre was 'Role Play Game' (RPG), with Action, Adventure and Strategy also popular (see figure 29).
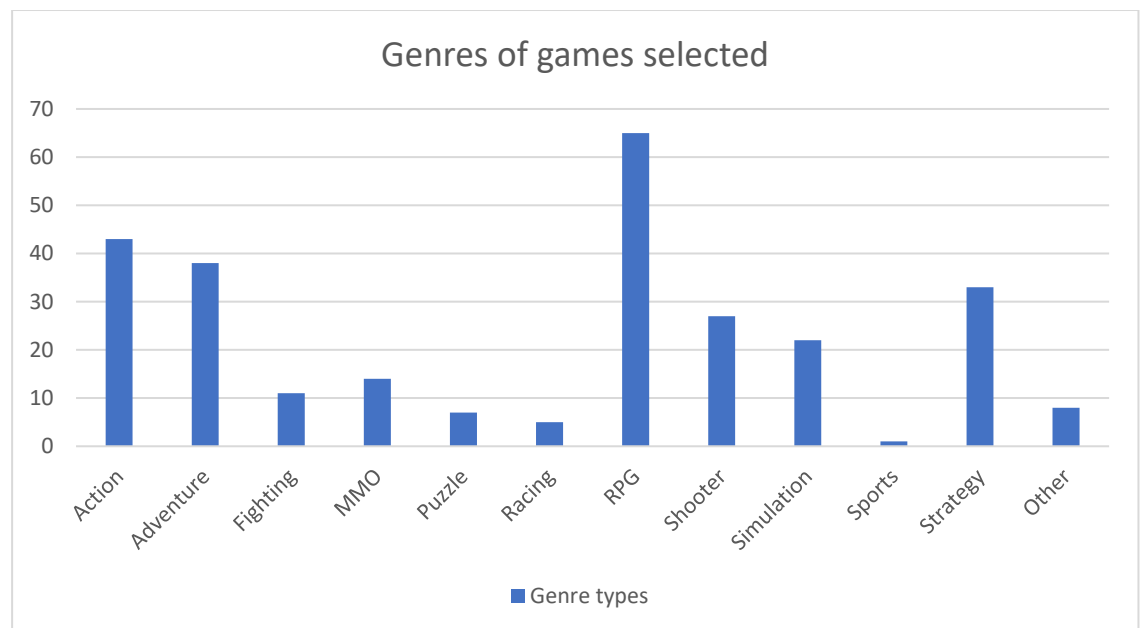

Figure 29 Games' genres (choose any applicable)

When looking for participant groups with choices particularly different from the average of the sample, the only distinctive group found are those participants that are male, university educated who were moe likely to choose a strategy game contrary to every other demographic group. With current students, non-degree educated, and generally female participants strategy games were not within the three most popular genres. These groups

preferred adventure games instead (see figures 30 & 31 below).

Most common genre choices by gender
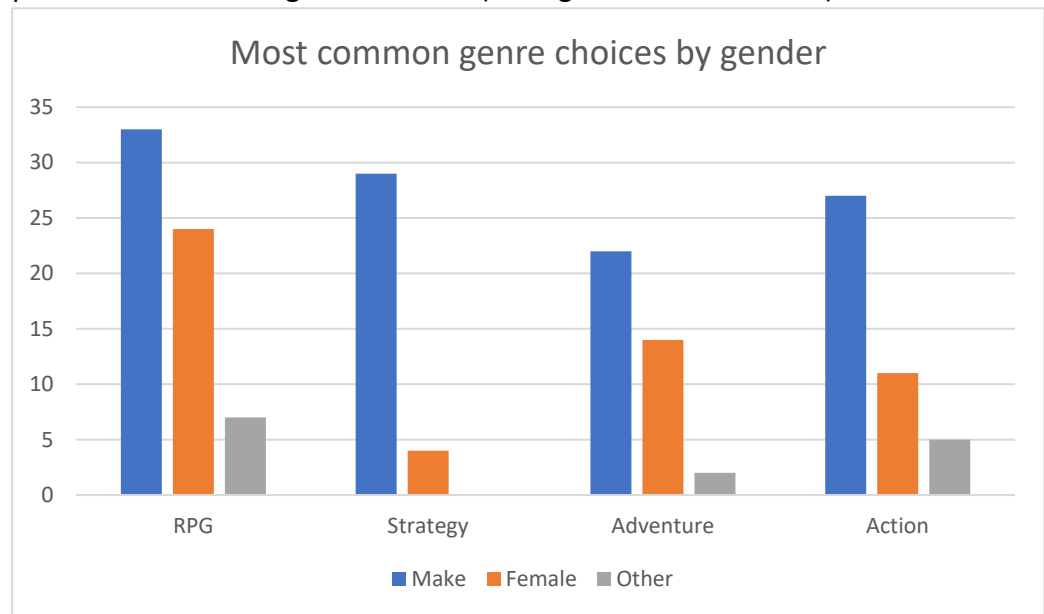
Figure 30 Most common genre choices by gender

Genre choices by level of education
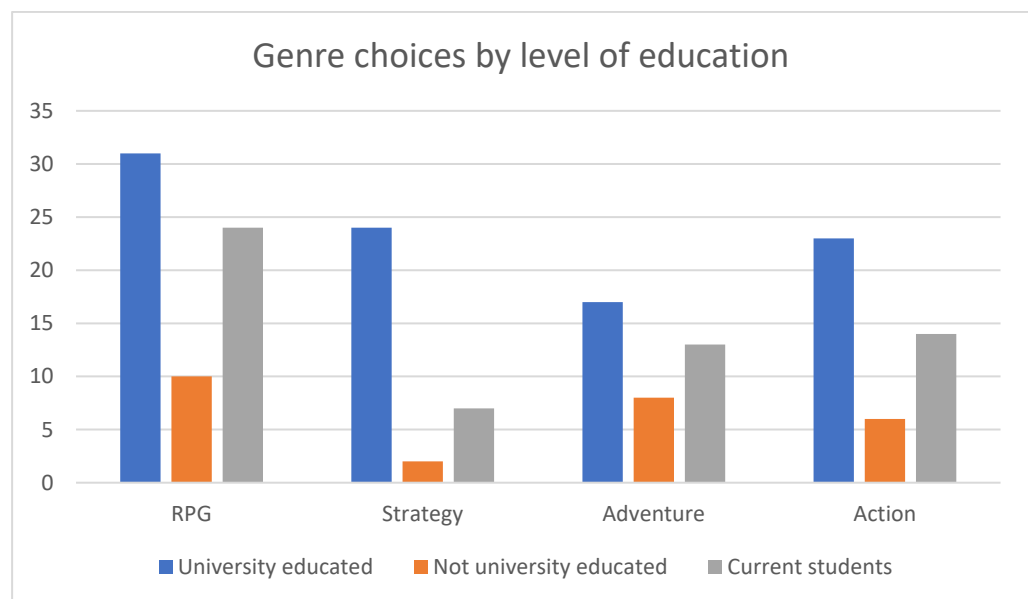
Figure 31 Genre choices by level of education
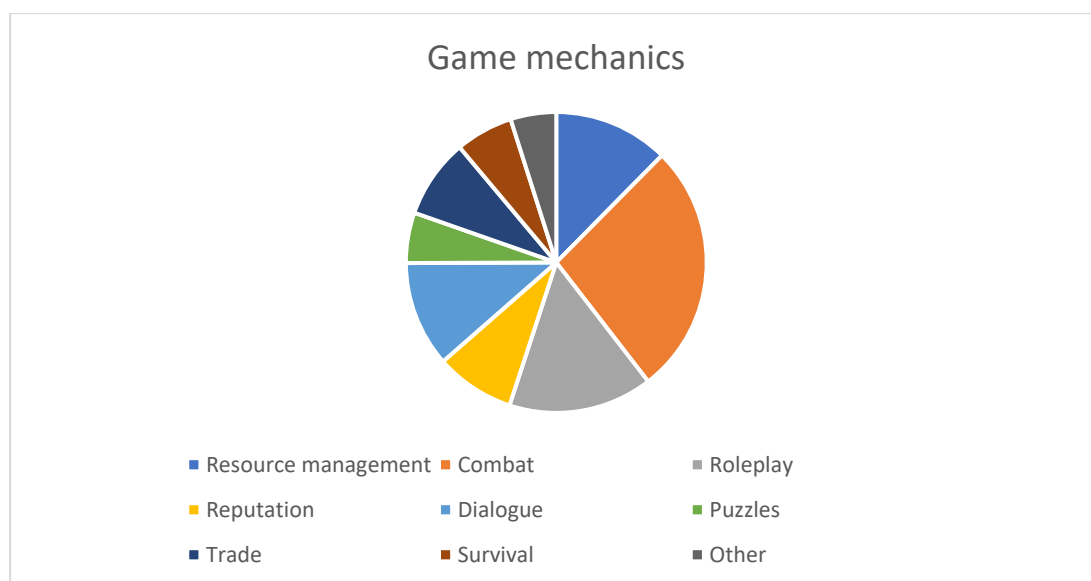
Figure 32 Game mechanics (choose any applicable)

The game mechanics in the games explored were diverse, but combat turned out to be the dominantly popular one among them all (figure 32). Similarly, the notion of progress was the most popular game goal (figure 33) and exploration the most frequent way to achieve this goal (figure 34).

Figure 33 Game Goals (choose any applicable)

Figure 34 Ways to achieving the goals (choose any applicable)

In regards to dramatic elements of the games, notion of the story focusing on a calling, e.g. to become the hero (n=60) as well as the notion of being on an adventure of some sort (n=56) were the most popular kinds of narratives (see figure 35). Fittingly, the most frequent setting of the game was 'Fantasy' (n=51/37.5%), with Space or Science Fiction setting coming second with come distance (n=26/19.9%) (figure 36).

Figure 35 Game story or narrative type (choose any applicable)
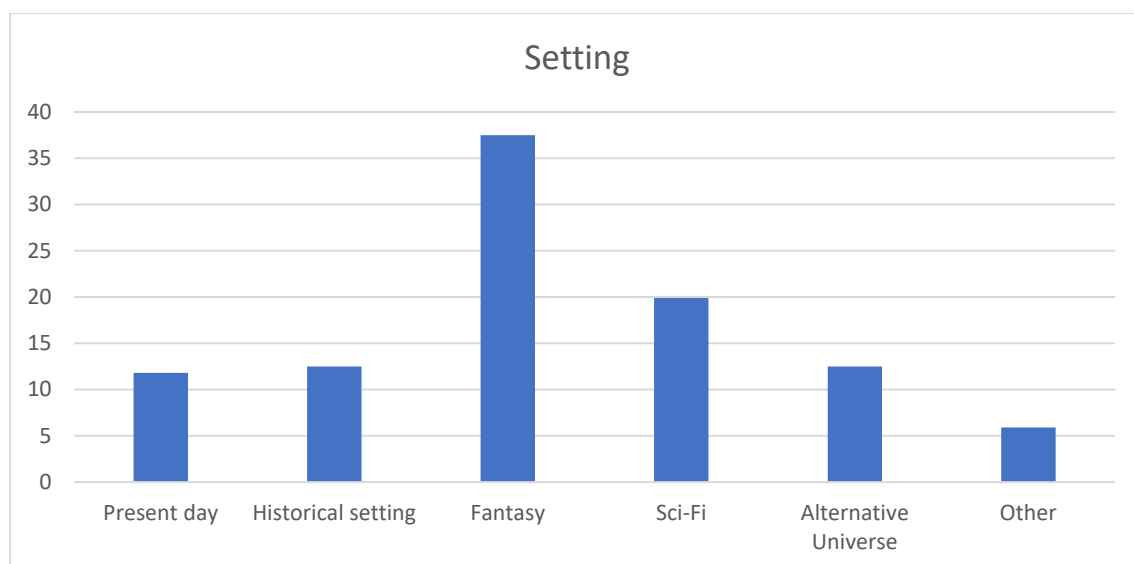
Figure 36 Game setting

Fitting with the notion of the game featuring a calling of some kind, the role of being the 'hero' was most popular (n=82) among the chosen games, with a position of leadership coming second (figure 37). Appropriately for this prominent role, participants also said that in the majority of games (n=80/58.8%), players would be able to influence the game or its story.
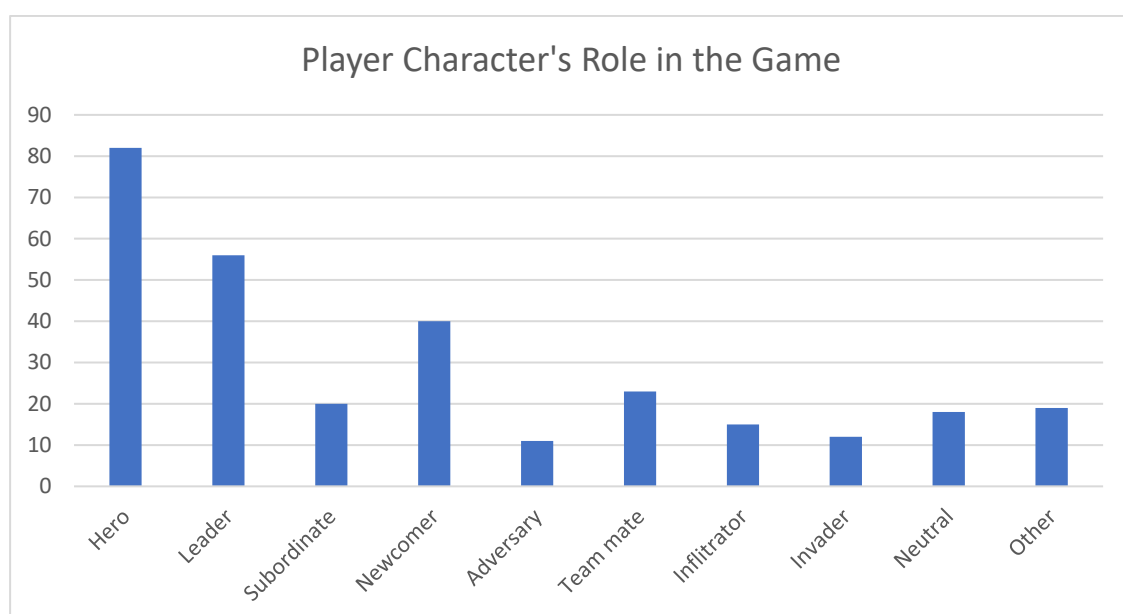
Figure 37 Player Character's role in the game

Politics in Games

As mentioned above, some of the elements of the Politics in Games framework were put forward to participants in the shape of questions rather than concepts, to cater for participants with different levels of knowledge on politics and games. The basic concepts in the framework were also supplemented with a question about the perceived realism of politics in each game, which was a point of interest in debating politics in games previously.

The forms politics can take varied between games and was diverse (see figure 38). The most popular one was any form of military expression (n=84), however issues such as power struggles (n=79), ideologies and values (n=75) and the general notion of influencing others through various means (n=70) were also common.
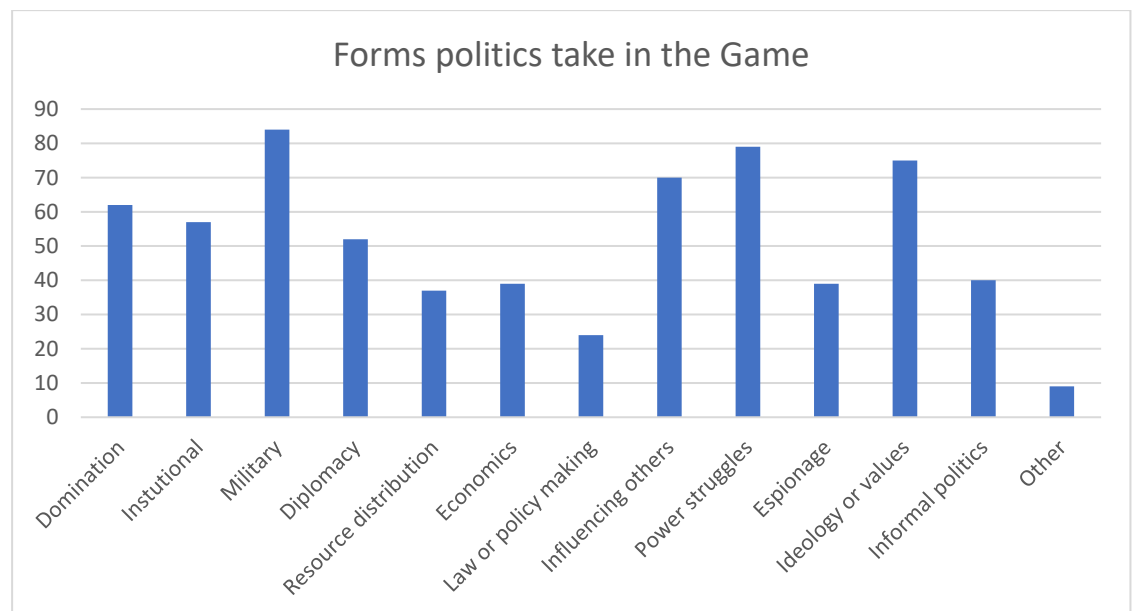
Figure 38 Forms of politics

Participants noted that politics were mostly implemented in the narrative of a game (n=70 / 51.5%) but could also be found in both narrative and game mechanics (n=37 / 27.2%). Politics exclusively in the game mechanics themselves were less common (n=25 / 18.4%).

Similarly to the notion of the player being able to influence the overall narrative of the game, a comparative number of games were also thought to provide players with the opportunity to influence political elements of the game (n=76 / 55.9%), whereas 44.1% (n=60) reported this was not possible.

Being a hero, as mentioned above, and being able to influence story and political elements does however not always translate into holding a political

position or role. Only 63 (46.3%) games were put forward where this was the case, contrary to 73 (53.7%) where this was not the case.

Finally, there is the issue of how realistic politics in games tends to be. Here the answer seems to be less straightforward (figure 39).
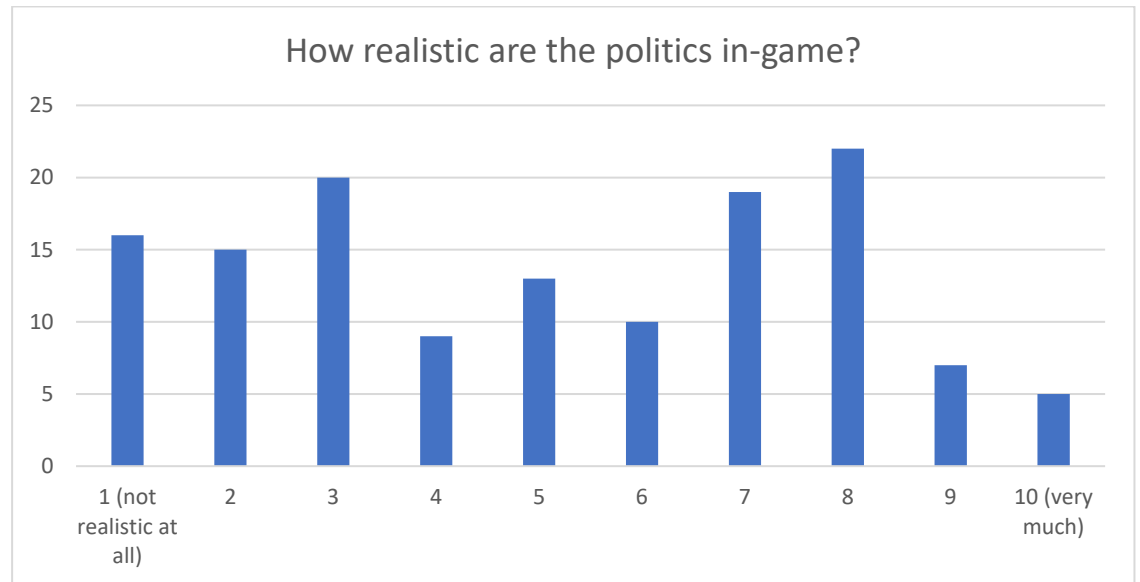
Figure 39 Perceived realism of politics in-game

On average, participants through the game was somewhat realistic, coming up with a mean of 5.07. However when looking at the numbers it become obvious that there seems to be many games with little perceived realism being contrasted with an similarly big number of games with high perceived realism, leading to a medium average, that is not reflected in the frequencies of games actually being of a medium level of realism.

When comparing between genres (table 23), similar patterns can also be observed. No individual genre with a larger number of cases has a perceived average realism score of 6 or above. Shooter games (5.88) and Action games (5.74), followed by RPGs (5.56) are the genres most likely associated with realistic politics in them. While Fighting games do come to an average of 7, the overall number of individual games is comparatively small. Finally, all genres with adequate numbers of cases have a 'realism range' from 4.75 (including MMOs)/5.05 to 5.88 and thus close to one another.

Genre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean
Action	3	4	6	1	2	3	8	5	3	4	5.74
Adventure	2	6	2	2	4	2	9	6	2	1	5.53
Fighting		1			1		2		2	1	7
MMO	2		3	1	1	1	1	3			4.75
Puzzle		1	1	1						1	4.75
Racing			3		1						3.5
RPG	5	5	6	4	5	5	12	14	2	1	5.56
Shooter	2	1	4	1	2	4	3	3	2	2	5.88
Simulation	1	3	5		2	2	3	2		2	5.05
Sports	1										1
Strategy	1	3	5	2	7	2	5	3	2	1	5.29
Other	2		1			2	1			1	2.57

Table 23 Realism of Politics between Genres

Finally, when checking for the above in the case studies, a discovery was made of a connection between political agency for the player and dominance or realism of politics in the game, a significant between means in regards to their realism score can be found between those games that give the player some form of agency over political events contrary to those which do not. A one-way ANOVA was performed for this, finding that the differences in means for agency (6.01) and those which do not give agency (4.4) is indeed statistically significant ($p=0.001$, F=1.774). This was further considered with the examination of the direction of the relationship between agency-granting status and perceived realism score. The correlation between the two of them proved to be negative, meaning no agency was linked with lower realism (-.251) as well as being statistically significant ($p=0.006$).

If considering difference between the general sample population and the one distinct group, university educated males who picked a strategy game, there are almost no statistically significant differences between what they chose for their games vis-à-vis other participants. The only difference that could be found was that this group was more likely to believe that or pick in which players could influence any of its political elements. The mean for this group was 1.23 – with 1 meaning yes to the being able to influence it – contrary to 1.48 for other parts of the sample population as calculated through a one-way ANOVA $p=0.027$). Interestingly enough, the same group was also statistically more like to believe that politicians would 'care about people like me/us' with a mean of 4.77 contrary to 3.73 by others ($p=0.035$), which is also above the general sample mean of 3.9.

Finally, participants also added a lot to their response through the open questions and 'other' options in the questionnaire. Based on the number of responses, it was easier for participants to discuss and find 'other' options for game design elements over political aspects. Concurrently, there were more

opportunities for open replies and 'other' categories through the game related questions, therefore a difference in numbers between the two fields is not surprising.

Also, not all 'other' and open responses in accordance with what the questionnaire asked for or replicated concepts already put forward in different words. For example, one participants mentions 'third person shooter' as other genre, when the general 'shooter' is already an option to pick, 'defeating enemies' is given as a game mechanic option, while combat is already a proposed category or participants describe a goal as 'to get the highest score', which can be argued as being the same as the proposed category of 'be the best of the first'. Another described the way to achieve goals as "like many sidescrollers, you go to the right to progress. I'm not sure which answer this would fit under... Maybe exploration?", while the notion of progress towards a location/goal/storyline is concurrently an option to choose.

Others mention things that were less easy to classify and were not part of the questionnaire as of yet, including the notion of 'sandbox' as a genre in itself, the role of 'player created content' in a game and how some goals, like exploration, can also be considered a game mechanic, while others put forward the notion that a game, in this case *The Witness*, can be based on concept (progression) without being a game mechanic in the classic sense.

There seems thus scope for further clarification and editing of categories and questionnaire/framework, which will be further discussed in the discussion section.

Case study: Skyrim

As mentioned, 'The Elder Scrolls 5: Skyrim' was the most frequently mentioned game in the survey, being put forward as example game nine times. In addition, it was also one of the games originally used during the case studies earlier in the development progress (see chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter). As such it is of interest to consider any differences, both between participants and their individual notions of what the game is as well as between framework developer and participants in applying the framework to the same game.

Let us first consider what the nine participants thought of 'Skyrim'.

Genre	Yes	No
Action	3	6
Adventure	5	4

Fighting	2	7
MMO	0	9
Puzzle	0	9
Racing	0	9
RPG	9	0
Shooter	0	9
Simulation	0	9
Sports	0	9
Strategy	0	9
Other	0	9

Table 24 Skyrim's genres according to participants

Participants agree on one thing here; Skyrim is a role play game (RPG) (see table 24). They are also sure about a lot of genres the game does not fall into: it's not an online game/MMO, Puzzle, Racing game, Shooter, a simulation, sports or pure strategy game. There is however no clear result in regards to 'adventure' and to a lesser degree, action and fighting. This could be due to that there were no definitions given to participants as part of the survey and they thus had to rely on their own knowledge and experience to categorise the games. In addition, some categories are harder to define than other in general, and games can fall into more than one, as visible here. Based on this, Skyrim seems to be dominantly an RPG for participants, but can also be argued to feature elements of other genres.

Game mechanics	Yes	No
Resource management	0	9
Combat	8	1
Roleplay	7	2
Reputation	2	7
Dialogue	8	1
Puzzles	2	7
Trade	1	8
Survival	1	8
Other	1	8

Table 25 Game mechanics in Skyrim according to participants

Contrary to genre, there was no single game mechanic participants choosing to describe Skyrim could completely agree on, apart from the fact that there is no resource management in the game (see table 25). Two mechanics,

combat and dialogue, were however agreed on by 8 out of 9 participants, followed by 'roleplay' with 7 out of 9. This fits well with the overall agreement that Skyrim is a Role Play Game, seeing how roleplaying and interacting with the world are important aspects to the genre and Skyrim as a game overall. Less often chosen mechanics such as reputation mechanisms or puzzle solving are indeed featured on the game too, but objectively speaking take up only a fraction of the overall playing time. While this could be seen as difficulty to fully express the game through these terms, it is more so a sign of the extent and variety of things found in the game. Skyrim is often considered an 'open world game' allowing the player for a lot of freedom in regards to what they do at any time of the game. As such some aspects of the game can be experienced less often or intensely than others for some players based on their choice and preferences.

Adding 'open world' as a category or description might however be useful for future iterations of the framework.

Game Goals	Yes	No
Domination	1	8
Survival	2	7
Resource acquisition and growth	2	7
Progress	9	0
Be the best or first	2	7
Solve puzzles	0	9
Simulation	0	9
Other	0	9

Table 26 Goals of Skyrim according to participants

Agreement is on the need to 'progress' and what are not goals of the game (puzzles being a mechanics, but only as a means to an overall end) (see table 26). Other goals such as survival or be the best are only perceived by a few participants as actual goals. This could be because they are also interlinked with the overall drive for progress.

Achieving goals	Yes	No
Capture	2	7
Chase	2	7

Race	0	9
Alignment	1	8
Rescue or Escape	1	8
Construction	2	7
Exploration	8	1
Solution finding	5	4
Outwitting an opponent	2	7
Other	2	7

Table 27 How to achieve goals in Skyrim according to participants

While 'progress' is the dominant goal, the ways to achieve this goal are diverse, not least based on participants' perception of the game (see table 27). Again, the game allows for many ways to be played and thus also achieve goals as evident from the results. Exploration is particularly important for progress, hence the many 'votes' for it by participants.

Story and/or Narrative	Yes	No
Adventure	9	0
Mystery	1	8
Revenge or redemption	0	9
Calling	7	2
Unlikely events	3	6
Being in charge	1	8
Historical	0	9
No obvious narrative	0	9
Other	1	8

Table 28 Skyrim's story or narrative according to participants

Adventure and (heroic) calling are the two kinds of story and narrative types participants agree most on is the case in Skyrim (see table 28). This not only works also well with the overall notion of this being a RPG games, as discussed above , but also works with being classified as an 'adventure' by several participants previously.

Regarding setting, 8 out of 9 participants agreed that Skyrim has a 'Fantasy' setting, with one participant preferring to refer to it as Alternative Universe.
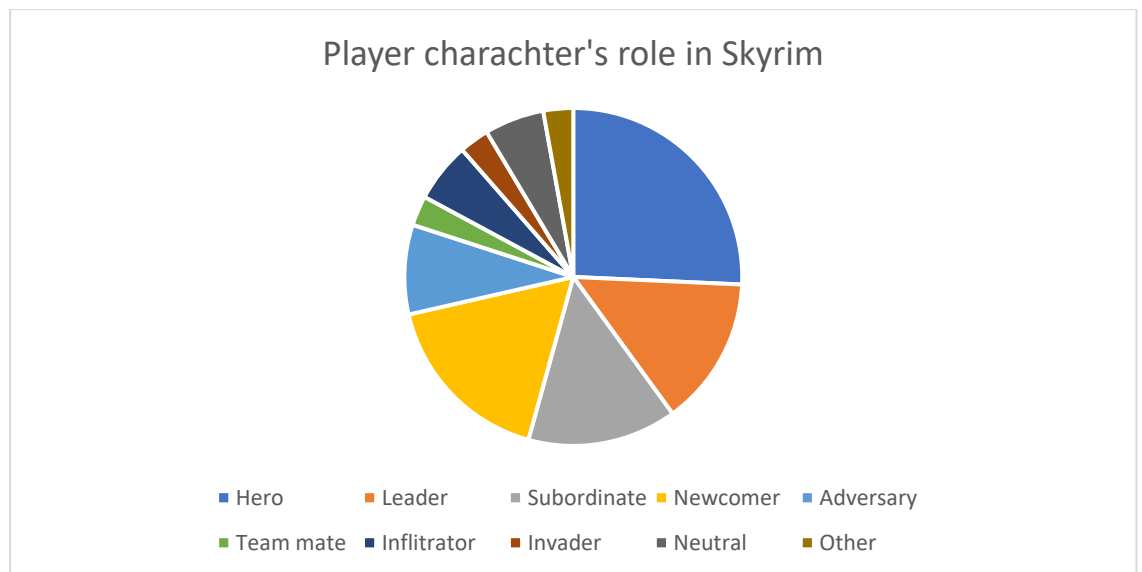
Figure 40 The player character's role in Skyrim according to participants

The player characters according to participants have many different roles (see figure 40). They are primarily heroes but can be a lot of different things in between. Participants however did not agree on that this would be based on the results. Most participants think that the player is also a newcomer in the game, which is in tune with the basic premise of most games in the Elder Scrolls series as one participant remarked of the 'other' option:

> "*In Elder Scroll traditions, the hero always starts out as a prisoner who gets freed by circumstance, and gets a second shot at life. Other roles the PC may fulfill are apprentice/student, craftsman, and spouse/parent.*"

It is of further interest to see that the role of leader as well as subordinate are both equally often mentioned between participants. This reflects the change of position the player can go through throughout the game, as one participant describes it when discussing the overall story or narrative of the game, instead showing how there are many storylines to be found that are mostly independent of each other.

> "*The game has several, independent storylines. The main quest tells the story of the prophesized Dragonborn, and his ascension of power through the slaying of Alduin, the World-Eater. The College of*

Winterhold questline is the hero's journey through the ranks of a school of magic, where s/he must also stave off the end of the world through an ancient artifact. The Thieves' Guild questline is focused on repairing the lost honor of the Thieves' Guild. The Dark Brotherhood questline sees the hero as becoming a master assassin, culminating in the assassination of the Emperor. The Companions questline sees the hero journey through the ranks of a fighter's guild, proving honor through strength and battle. The Civil War storyline deals with the possible secession of Skyrim from the Empire, under the leadership of Ulfric Stormcloak, Jarl of Windhelm. The player chooses sides between the Imperial Legion and the Stormcloaks, and propels that chosen faction to solidify their rule over Skyrim by capturing each Hold and installing a Jarl favorable to them. In the two story-driven DLCs, the hero must become a vampire or a vampire-slayer and obtain a legendary bow that can blot out the sun (Dawnguard DLC), and travel to the island of Solstheim to stop another Dragonborn from enslaving the people of that island (Dragonborn DLC). There are also several side-quests, as well as a non-story-driven DLC (Hearthfire) that allows players to construct homesteads."

Both results and quotes show how difficult, if not impossible, it is to position a game in only one category. Keeping the possibility open to accommodate for several options and categories is thus important.

Finally, with all the previous results suggesting that players have a diverse choice in how they want to play in Skyrim, participants also went on to agree that players can influence the game and in particular the story line of Skyrim through their choices.

Politics in Skyrim

Form	Yes	No
Domination	5	4

Institutional	8	1
Military	9	0
Diplomacy	7	2
Resource distribution	0	9
Economics	0	9
Law or policy making	0	9
Influencing others	9	0
Power struggles	9	0
Espionage	1	8
Ideology or values	6	3
Informal politics	4	5
Other	0	9

Table 29 What form politics takes in Skyrim according to participants

Politics takes on different forms in Skyrim for participants (see table 29). These include influencing others, military elements and power struggles, which are the ones everyone agreed on. Institutional politics (8 participants) as well as diplomacy (7 participants) were other popular options. Other were less distinct among participants, these include domination (5), ideologies and values (6) and informal politics (4). As such it is also a rating from the most prominent forms of politics to those that are less obvious, e.g. informal politics or ideologies, and depending on player's choices can even be avoided.
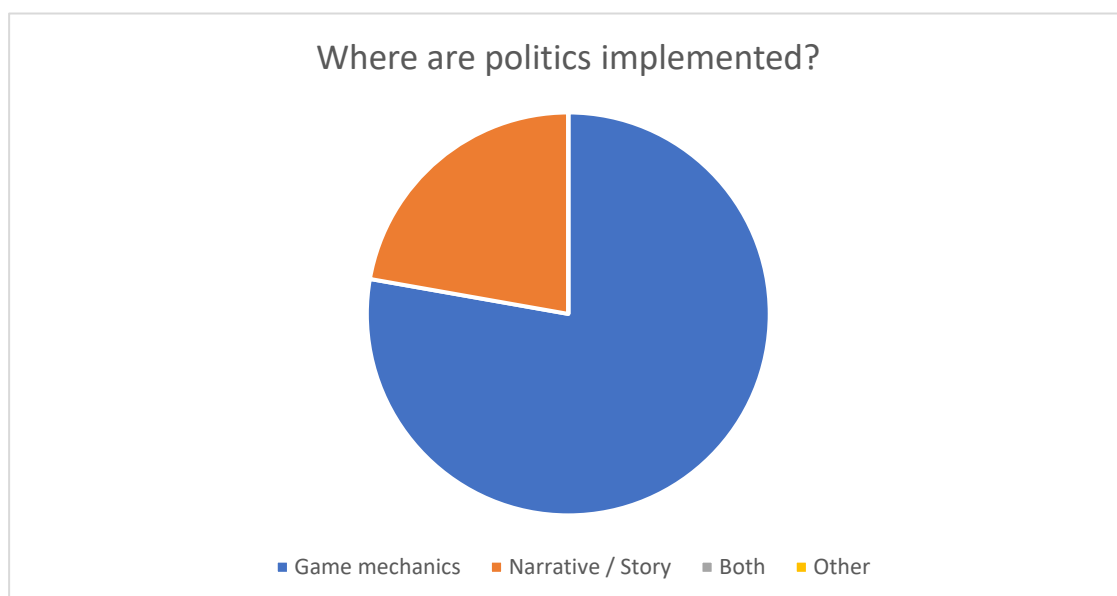
Figure 41 In which parts of the game politics can be found according to participants

Similar to the overall game and story, participants see it as clear that players can influence political elements in the game, as all agree on this. Not least

through holding a political position themselves at some point during the game, which again all participants agreed on.

This makes sense seeing how these are interwoven in Skyrim as well as the diverse role(s) player characters can have as discussed around figure 37. Interestingly enough, participants did however not consider that politics in the game are more likely to be found in the general game mechanics over the story (see figure 41). This is in direct opposition to what was found in the case study earlier in this chapter.
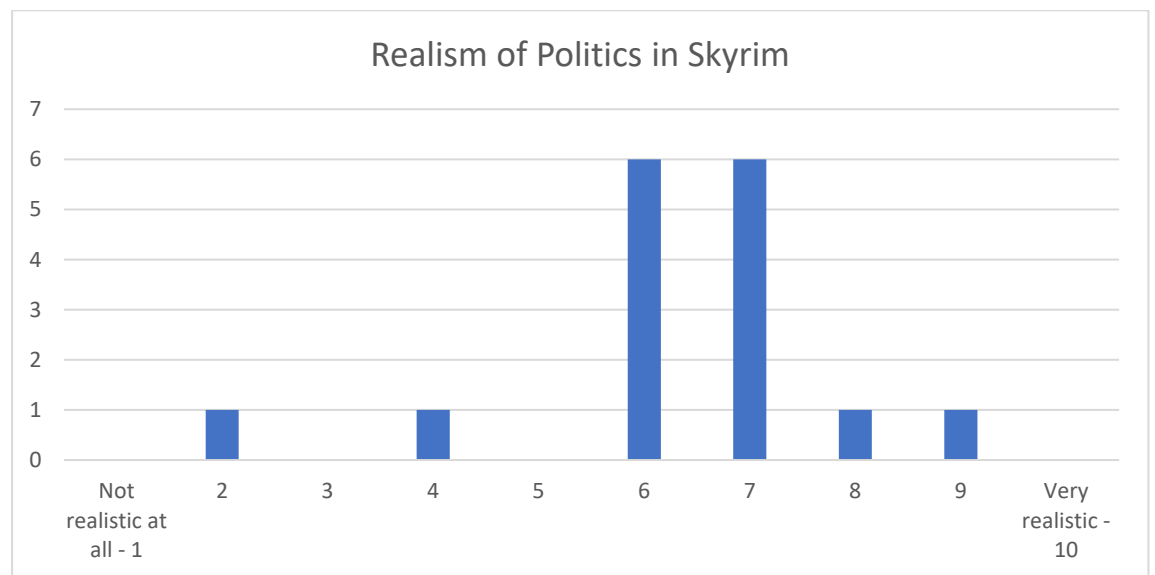
Figure 42 Realism of politics in Skyrim according to participants

Participants believed that the politics found in Skyrim are of a medium realism level with an average of 6.13 on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much), with the most often used ratings being 6 and 7 (see figure 42). This is quite different from the overall results of realism in games question found among all questionnaire data. While the averages might be similar, Skyrim ratings agree fairly with one another, whereas the overwhelming number of ratings in the overall data showed a tendency for politics being either not particularly realistic or being more realistic than Skyrim is found to be.

5.2.3. Discussion

Coming back to the original goal of this study, to test the framework with other individuals without a similar background in politics and gaming, the results are encouraging.

In summary, the framework can indeed be used as a tool for analysis by individuals without an in-depth background in politics or game. However, there are some limitations, stemming from the potential (mis-) understanding of concepts used by some participants, wording in the survey (especially question 17 on other aspects that might not have been covered by the questionnaire), participants being unsure how to classify or categorise certain things or where politics begins and ends in the game and thus end up searching for politics for the sake of it or because they were told to do so. Nevertheless, the cases where the framework was used correctly vastly outnumber the ones where there were problems. A lot of these problems also stemmed from the fact that the survey was based on the old version of the framework as well as the wording and limitations of the survey itself, e.g. there had been no possibility to explain the concepts further. Considering these factors, the outcome is overall positive as long as future uses of the framework account for the above-mentioned issues and limitations.

5.2.3.1.   *How the framework was used by participants*

While the framework in its questionnaire form also influenced how participants used it and answered the provided questions, they nevertheless showed an overarching particular approach to doing so and thinking about the game that is worth considering in more detail.

Participants were beginning their analysis by considering the game and its design in formal categories, starting from mechanics, moving to narrative elements and less hard and fast notions such as player agency. Once they

immersed themselves into the game, they moved away from the formal descriptions of the game, describing it in their own words, gaining a different, overall more holistic perspective on it as found in their descriptions.

Having thus gained a better overall understanding of the game through reflections and categorisation, the formal political aspects of the game were considered. Again, similar to the process of reflecting on the game in general, the process moved from formal aspects to more in-depth, 'free flowing' analysis which also brought to the forefront potentially usually hidden aspects such as worldviews and ideologies.

'Politics' as was thus treated as a further or lower layer of the overall game, that was approached by slowing 'working downwards' from general 'game surface' to the 'political layer'. However, this process was not as straightforward and easier for some participants than others, as demonstrated by the variety of answers to the free text questions. It could be argued that the transition from general game elements to politics was too sudden and the political descriptors could have included more details or better explanations for some participants.

Overall, this can be best described as participants using a 'double funnel' process when using the framework (see figure 43). A funnel focusing on game design and its analysis, going into the politics funnel which in turn brings out the overall analysis of politics in the game, as informed by the overall game design.
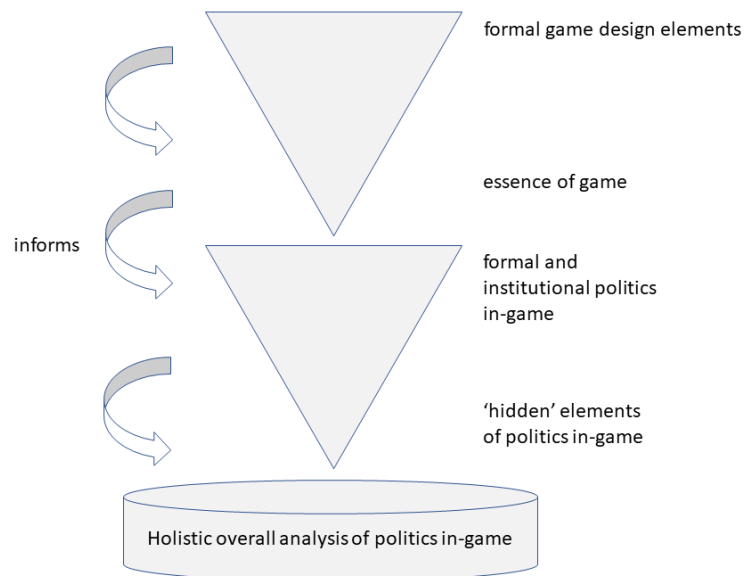
Figure 43 The 'double funnel' process of how participants used the Politic in Games Framework

Based on the 100 plus cases where participants did successfully use the framework through the survey as intended and came up with an analysis, it can be said that overall the framework was used as envisioned.

In addition, there are several special occurrences that could be observed when looking at how participants used the framework:

- *Underlying ideas, messages and ideologies*. For question 17 in the survey ("*Is there any other aspect of politics in the game that is not covered by any of the above questions? E.g. has the game some sort of underlying value-set or ideology, a particular 'message' or something similar?*") participants focused on underlying messages or ideologies found in their game over other potential political elements. This was likely influenced by the wording of the question, thus representing an unanticipated bias. This notwithstanding, participants who chose to answer this question had overall a good grasp of the underlying ideas, messages and ideologies of their chosen game, e.g. "The game is set in an anarchist state within a corporate/capitalist setting. This clash of ideologies is one of the key focuses of the game" when talking about *Shadowrun Dragonfall.*

The levels of awareness give furthermore support for including these aspects in future iterations of framework and questionnaires.

- *Games without any politics in them were not catered for appropriately.* Due to the way the survey was structured, it made it necessary for all games to answer questions about politics, even if the game, e.g. *Pinball* or *Super Mario Kart*, did not feature any politics according to the participant. In addition, there were no options among the multiple-choice questions to indicate the non-existence of political elements in a game. This was only possible in the free text questions and some participants did indeed take the chance to comment of the non-existence of politics in their game. This is therefore a case were using the framework instead of an online questionnaire would have been beneficial, as it does not assume the existence of politics in a game in the first place.

  The original reasoning behind forcing participants to answer most, if not all questions, was to invite reflections on the game in more detail rather than coming to the quick decision that there would not be any politics in them at all, inviting the danger of overseeing potential hidden or less obvious political elements.

- *The danger and potential for overthinking.* While the aim of getting participants to think about their game choice in more detail worked overall, it however also at times led to a tendency to overthink among some participants (On *Pokemon*: "Depends on the game. It's hinted at that the politics are run by the league champion and that everything is government run. Different regions will have more or less of a controlled feel.") or alternatively less serious ones ("*Who says that you can't teach an old dog new tricks?*" on Super Mario Sunshine). It is thus imperative for the framework and any other tools based on it. to be not too forceful in its focus on politics, while still inviting deeper reflection on the user side.

- *Personal and group politics feature stronger.* Participants focused a lot more on personal and group politics in their game analyses than expected. This might also be due to the games participants choose, e.g. the Sims 4

that features elements and discussions of social politics, gay marriage and transgender according to participants.

- *Ethical aspects.* Participants also mentioned their awareness of ethical questions in their games ("Your choices influence how you play but not the ending: you always end up having to choose between 4 options. The 4 options, however, have clear political messages about human's ability to think for themselves, sacrifice, science ethics, and media coverage" on *Deux Ex: Human Revolution* or "At the core of the story is the concept that X, a human-like robot, must destroy malfunctioning robots, which creates an ethical dilemma. In terms of politics, there isn't much to go on" on *Mega Man X*) These ethical dimensions, while good to ponder about, were however not always political in the classical sense. Provisions enabling the distinction between the two would thus be useful features in future iterations.

- *Year of release*. At least one participant took into consideration the time when their game was released as part of their analyses ("This is all pretty tricky, because I chose an older game from 1993" on the above-mentioned *Mega Man* X game). This is an interesting notion, which was not originally part of the analysis process. Would a game's age make a difference? Potentially yes, as e.g. what was deemed political may have changed, though political institutions, changes in society and technology, and other political elements are likely to have stayed the same. In the case of the example of *Mega Man X*, it may have indeed changed due to the changed relation to and notion of robots and AI.

Are the concepts as featured in the framework thus understood and applied by participants correctly? As the results are based on the survey and not the original framework (nor its current version), this can only be said with appropriate limitations. The survey could have been more detailed at times, especially when dealing with certain concepts that might be unknown to

participants. However, there were also many cases of participants using the framework and its concepts appropriately, as discussed in the results section, suggesting that the overall structure and concepts work well.

The use of the framework through a questionnaire and the survey's results also delivered some insights into what needs to be considered when making questionnaires out of the framework.

- *The framework can be turned into a questionnaire that does not require in-depth knowledge of the concepts involved*. It is possible to produce a questionnaire based on the framework that allows collection of the information necessary for analysis, while also providing a common understanding of the political elements in games as would be the case when using purely the framework. This way a lower degree of prior understanding of the concepts used in the framework is necessary, becoming thus potentially more accessible.

- *Using the framework-based questionnaire enables the inclusion of other game related questions important for the overall analysis*. In addition to the above, the questionnaire further allows for the integration of general game analysis elements that are not part (and not the focus) of the framework, but are however an important foundation for using the 'Politics in Games' framework. This allows the framework to be used by a greater number of users who do not have prior knowledge and understanding of general game design.

  o The questions allowed participants to become familiar with thinking about the game in a more structured way and/or familiarise them with game design terms in general, before focusing on any political elements.

  o As such it shows the limits (as intended) of the framework

- *Options given in the framework seem appropriate to cater for most games*. Every one of the presented categories in the framework-questionnaire has been used several times by participants. A few additions can be made based on participants feedback.

  - *Example*: the inclusion of 'open-world' to describe a game

- Problems/deficiencies that became apparent:

  - *The questionnaire did not give participants the option to say that there are no politics in the game* – participants were able to express this and other thoughts on the game however through commenting it in the open-ended or 'if other, then…' questions such as Q12 *"Is there any form of 'politics' in-game?"* or Q17/*"Is there any other aspect of politics in the game that is not covered by any of the above questions?"*

    - *Example*: "There is no form of politics in-game." (Q12, referring to the game *Pinball FX 2*)
      "There Is basically no politics in this game. There is as much politics in this game as an exclusively multiplayer fps game or a football match." (Q17, referring to the game *Smite*)

  - This can be taken as a reminder that games without politics do indeed exist 'in the wild'. In general however, this was never questioned, and the framework itself could still be used to come up with the same conclusion. It is more a short coming of the questionnaire that would need to be addressed in future iterations

  - *The notion of realism of politics is a difficult concept as it is too subjective with no real comparisons or definitions*. It is also uncertain whether it is really necessary for creating a better understanding of politics through a game and could thus be omitted in the overall framework. This is what eventually happened as a result of this in the current iteration of the

framework. On a side note, low realism was not related to having no politics in the results, given further credit to the notion that the two do not need to be interactive.

- o No dedicated point to give feedback for participants other than through the open-ended questions. This again should be changed in any future iteration of the questionnaire

- *The questionnaire works, but additional information on different political concepts might be useful.* Looking at the categories participants suggested and how these could arguably be included in the existing categories, it (again) becomes apparent that better explanations of what individual groups and categories mean are needed for participants. This can be provided as a supplement to the framework.

  - o *Example*: "The conceit of the game is the creation of artificial intelligence in post-human earth. There is some form of politics in there, but I'm not sure how it fits into question 12." (Q17 referring to the game *The Talos Principle*)

- *Gaming agency is important for political agency in-game*. Coming back to the above-mentioned observation from the case studies, there is indeed a significant positive relationship between having agency to change the outcome of the game and having political agency in a game

- *The difference between having politics in the narrative of the game mechanics seem to make for no difference in experience of politics in-game overall*. The 'location' of politics in the game does not matter for the framework and as such this question could be omitted from future iterations.

  - o *Example*: differences between location of politics between mine and the participants' views on *Skyrim*, which still led to an overall similar description and experience of politics as described through the framework and the questionnaire.

Furthering the discussion on differences between the 'expert' use of the framework in the case studies and the more random sample of the online survey, several things can also be observed in general in addition to the above:

Given that the case studies were updated to reflect the current state of the framework, while participants' answers to the questionnaire were based on an earlier and adapted version of the same, it is difficult to give an exact answer to the question of what the exact differences are, but some things can be noted based on the differences in structure alone, e.g. since the study did not give participants an option to 'measure' or describe the level of Agency players have.

The case studies were written with the aim of being as detailed as necessary in order to convey the use of the different variables of the framework. The survey was composed to give participants a structure to discuss a game's politics in a similar fashion. However, it depended on the participants whether they were willing to engage with the matter in a similar detailed fashion.

Comparing the amount of details participants give, stark differences between the way questions were answered can be found. While some participants wrote longer passages for each open question, in part similar or even more detailed to the 'expert case studies', e.g. in the description of the game 'the Witness', other did chose not to add any free text at all, thus having a fairly 'minimalist' approach to answering.

As mentioned above, comparing the more detailed survey answer to the expert case studies, both have similar levels of detail given the limitations of the survey to be mostly multiple choice based. They both discuss both the

more visible aspects of politics, such as institutional politics, as well the less obvious elements like personal politics and underlying messages and ideologies. The 'minimalist' answers still give an appropriate overview of the main political components and where to find them, but lack more context related information.

When comparing game to game analyses between the case studies and participants choosing the games, again keeping in mind that the case studies were updated to suit the current framework version, there is an overall similar way of using the framework and answering the questions. Politics are located in the same 'locations' and described with the same concepts. The one big difference found is the case of where politics in Skyrim can be found – the 'expert case study' described it as in the narrative whereas survey participants said it would be in the game mechanics.

Overall, it can thus be said that experts and 'lay users' can indeed use the framework in similar ways, however it requires a greater willingness on the layperson's side to discuss and dissect the politics in games in detail to measure up to the expert analysis.

On a side note, as some of participant's descriptions and analyses have come to the conclusion that there would be no politics in a game, e.g. such as the games from the 'Pokémon' series mentioned several times by different participants, this is fine as a result also. Afterall, the study's aim was to see how others would use the framework as presented through a questionnaire and not to prove that every game has a political element to it. Going back to the 'realism' issue of game just mentioned, the low levels of realistic politics can thus also be seen as participants finding that there are no or few politics in a game in the first place. However further observation of individual games in this category show that this was only true for a small sub-section (N=4) of this group.

Through the 'other' options, participants also included several categories or concepts that were not in the framework. This furthered the discussion on whether the framework was 'complete' in regards to elements featured in it. In addition, participants also mentioned several game genres and other game design concepts that could be added or at least mentioned when talking about the game design side of the analysis. However, given the changes to the framework and how it is used to analyse games, partially as a result of the survey, this may no longer be as important to the overall process.

Nevertheless, to give some examples of what was mentioned particularly often or seemed different to those categories and concepts already in the framework, the following notions and ideas should be mentioned:

- *Alliances*

Alliances, in their most basic meaning, are agreements between different (political) parties on cooperating to work together for a common goal. Political science gives this basic notion several additional characteristics: An alliance is made up of groups that were existing previously to the formation of the alliance. The distinctive pre-existing groups stay defined through the existence of the alliance and would resurface as independent entities if the alliance ceased to exist. From an institutional point of view, they are "a compound of existing units that is intended to preserve them intact, an alliance involves a plurality of decision-making procedures" (White, 2018, p.595) . In addition, the members of the alliance have their primary commitments with the members of their individual group or association, given the nature of the alliance being made up of 'second-order ties'. Contrary to other more secretive types of cooperation, alliances should usually also be publicly acknowledged by all of its members (White, 2018).

From a framework point of view, it would thus be possible to describe an alliance as a form of institutional politics, given its set structures. There would also need to be an element of negotiation, at least until the alliance has been

formed and throughout its existing to debate whether its existence is of interest and advantage for all sides involved. Alliances can be formed for various reasons, involving different areas of politics, e.g. for military interests such as NATO or between political parties forming a coalition government. As such it would already be fully possible to describe 'alliance' through the existing framework and thus might not be necessary to add it as a concept by itself. It may however be beneficial to include a mention of alliances in the examples and categories associated with the framework overall.

- *Specific (political) roles*

The idea for this came up through a participant mentioning the role of mayor for the player as a missing political element. While it could be an option to include a list of different (political) roles a player can take on in a game, most of these happen in a formal institutional structured way, e.g. head of city government / mayor. As such leaving more particular roles out and describing them under the general guise of 'institutional politics' might be advisable in order not to bloat the framework and its example categories already. It seems advisable however to include a note mentioning political roles as being a form of institutional politics for framework users less familiar with politics.

- *'Messages' a game might present, whether direct or indirect*

This was one of the most mentioned political elements by participants in the 'other' section. It might here be useful to consider how different these (political) 'messages' could be from any other political elements present in a game. Some of the earlier prominent research on games and politics previously discussed directly talks about how game designer's own beliefs and values are represented in the games they create (Squire, 2006). As such every game has the potential for having a 'hidden message'. In the context of the framework however, it seems more appropriate to replace 'hidden message'

with the ideologies and values built into it. Thus, it can be argued that the 'values and ideologies' categories in the Area variable can be an appropriate field in which to file this. However, similar to the above notions, it might be useful to at least mention the potential for an underlying ideology in games when analysing them in case the person doing the analysis is not aware of it as well as pinpointing to the relevant part in the framework.

- *Gods and mortals*

The mentioning of 'gods' and 'destiny' (e.g. in the context of the fantasy game 'Skyrim') as 'political' entities by a few participants is interesting and certainly different from what is currently found in the framework. It thus opens up the question whether it be reasonable to include something like this as an option in the framework to cater for fantasy settings or theocracies. Similarly, to the above, it could however also be argued that this is just another face of 'institutional politics'. The divine and faith can indeed be seen as an (organised) institution, similar to the influence and institution of the Catholic church in bygone centuries. As the framework is originally based on standard modern, mostly secular views of political concepts, it is of no wonder that these options were not previously included. Adding these options is however well in the scope of the current framework. One potential way for this could be through the creation of a sub-deck or module that caters for non-present day or historical settings as well as alternative universes, e.g. such as Fantasy of Sci-Fi settings. The base notions and concepts would still be the same in all of these cases however, making it more of a case of 'dressing up' ideas and concepts to fit better into these settings.

The state of the framework as a tool for analysis and future work

Keeping in mind the above discussion about differences between 'expert' and 'lay' analyses, and how there was a difference between participants in regards to the amount of details they chose to relay in their analyses, it can nevertheless be concluded that on average the framework is capable of covering the vast majority of politics. This is especially true when comparing participants' perception of politics in their game to how it was perceived with participants during the initial landscaping study. In the initial study discussed in chapter 3, politics was mostly associated with historical settings and strategy games. Through using the framework elements, participants were a lot more aware of personal and social/group politics as well as hidden biases, e.g. how SimCity2000 is more suitable for a one policy approach ("If you use cheat codes (like I used to do), it's about building cities. If you don't, it's about managing a very tight budget, and it tends to privilege a low-tax low-spend, security-driven model of urban planning") than others in games. Previously often 'hidden' areas of politics became thus more visible and therefore allowing for a more complete and holistic analysis.

However, the survey's results also revealed several points that could still be improved or at least considered about the framework and its usage.

- *Designer/developer's influence and backgrounds are not considered in-depth*. As the framework is more focused on the game as is experienced by the player and what can be observed from it, it has few to no provisions for considering its designer and what influence this may have on the overall experience. This could however be addressed in future work. Further deliberations on this can be found in the reflections in chapter 7.

- *The version of the framework used in the survey does not play enough attention to political engagement and limits it to the notions of agency*. Given that political engagement is however an important part

of my initial doctoral research questions, this is a major area where the framework needed to be a modified. Furthermore, while agency is a very important driving factor in promoting political engagement, other contributors such as Knowledge are crucial as well in many ways also related to the notion of agency. Therefore, the framework was revised into its current form as is presented in chapter 4, giving special emphasis on political engagement, when required without making it a pre-requirement to the political analysis entirely.

- *The survey's version of the framework focused too much on game design elements*. Related to the above point, when looking at participants' replies as well as the survey in general, it can be overserved that questions about game design take up a lot more space than does the discussion of politics. While some awareness of the game design elements is needed to fully locate and understand the use of politics in a game, the survey made it look like politics in games was only a side concern, which is the opposite from what is actually the case. A stronger separation from game design awareness and strengthening of the analysis of politics was therefore needed. This was responded to in the current version of the framework by removing most general game design considerations and instead focusing on politics entirely. Considering the game's overall design it is still an important pre-step of the analysis process, but is no longer included in the framework itself.

- *How do the original user groups of the framework and the survey's participants overlap?* The framework set out to be used by specific user groups, however other than a general level of education the occupation of participants is unknown. It is thus not possible to show its use for specific user groups in particular, apart from those currently in education. At the same time, it can be argued that testing the framework with a group of self-selected random participants is stronger evidence of certain levels of universal usability. If it works for

the 'general public', more specialised experts should also be able to use it.

- *Lack of formal participant feedback*. The survey gave participants little opportunity for giving feedback on the survey or the framework itself, thus limiting its ability for validation Participants nevertheless commented on it through the use of the free text answers, allowing for some additional validation in the process. Furthermore, future uses of the framework, e.g. during the design workshops in chapter 6, always allowed for and actively encouraged giving feedback on the framework and how it is to be used. Please refer to chapter 6's discussion of the framework and how the framework was considered useful by participants.

5.2.3.2.   On the games used in the survey

In regards to the total data, 95 individual games were successfully analysed by participants, indicating that the framework – in the shape of a survey in this case – is able to work for a lot of different games. The fact that the most frequent game was only used 9 times is a further expression of the used games diversity.

Participants backgrounds were fairly diverse and the kinds of game they chose were similarly varied. Games successfully described by participants included all possible listed genres offered and beyond as some participants also added genres such as 'MOBA' (multiplayer online battle arena). This shows that the framework is not limited to a particular kind of game or genre in its use.

Considering different game mechanics, some were more popular than others such as 'Combat' with 105 mentions whereas 'Puzzles' had only 21. Overall however, no gaming related category was mentioned less than 10 times, with

'solving puzzles' (game goal) and 'adversary' (role of player character) both being the least often mentioned ones with 11 uses each.

Similarly, all categories provided to participants in relation to politics have been used in at least parts of the games used in the survey. The provided categories seem thus useful to include in the overall notion and examples of the framework and any future iterations of it. Further, the use of many different categories again shows the overall diversity among games used in the survey.

The division of games in regards to their relative realism is also of interest. Comparatively few games, only 13 in total, received a realism score of 9 or 10 (the latter being labelled 'very realistic'). This might be an expression of the fact that politics in itself can be quite complex, too complex to be easily completely or realistically represented in a video game. Most portrayals seem only to be models of 'real' politics in order to fit it into an overall game rather than running into danger of taking away too much from the overall theme or idea behind the game by making politics too 'realistic'. This further suggests that politics can be a more or less realistic aspect of games, but rarely is the sole focus point of them, not withstanding certain exceptions such as the 'Democracy' series of games that completely focused on the parliamentary and policy side of politics.

When comparing realism between games, it is interesting to observe that there is no genre that is considered particularly more realistic than others. There is thus no typically politically genre. This is an intriguing find contrary to the original notion that strategy games can be particularly political as reported in chapter 3. Here, participants only give an average realism score of 5.29 to Strategy games contrary to say 5.88 for Shooters. Furthermore, the diversity within genres that can be found in the data and that lead to the very average scores for realism are an expression of how diverse the genres in themselves are and how lots of different kinds of games can be associated with the game genre category. In addition, the notion that more political agency for the player is connected to higher realism from the case studies

was given further backing through the significant differences in means between agency granting and non-granting games as well as the negative relations between non-agency and perceived realism.

A point for future research could be to further inquire whether there is a relationship between perceived realism, settings and genre as well as how participants came to this conclusion and how it changes their engagement with the political elements and any political educational effect the game may have.

Case study: The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Overall, participants, as well the original case study, agree with each other on many elements of the game. This suggests that the framework and questionnaire help to synthesise a cohesive notion of the analysed game.

The above discussed varieties in the analyses might stem from the nature of the game, Skyrim, itself, as it is very open and allows the player to focus more on some aspects the game offers over others when playing. This is visible among other in the different comments about various plot lines, exploration and the freedom to choose what the players wishes to do – even if it all leads to mayhem as one participant put it. Another example of this is the perception of what the player's role actually is – it is possible to be a bit of everything, if the player wishes so and this is reflected in participants answers giving support for all of the given options.

The same openness of the game is also responsible for the player's ability to influence both story and political elements in the game. Actually, all major changes in the world of Skyrim are driven by the player as being the decisive factor in many conflicts and situations in general. The inclusion of a 'open world' option in regards to the game's setting and 'player set' might help to improve the inclusion and flagging of such gaming titles into the framework in the future.

The main point of disagreement between the case study and the participants' perspective on the game is regarding where politics can be found in the game – participants believe this to be in the game mechanics, whereas the case studies puts it into the narrative. This is interesting and potentially rooted in a different perspective and understanding of what 'mechanics' mean. Certain political elements, e.g. supporting a side in the civil war, are needed to progress a game and as such could be argued are parts of the 'mechanics'. It is however also part of the story 'told' in the game. Better definitions and examples of what is meant with these two concepts seems thus appropriate moving forward with the framework.

Finally, in concerning the realism of politics in the game, coming to an average of an 6.19 rating, this can at least partially be explained in that the game is set in a fantasy setting. It is thus less straightforward to compare with current real existing politics. In addition, political elements tend to be slightly simplified in the game with the main rulers of the opposing sides having a major say in most things, hence the overall mid-rating of the game's realism. Though this did not seem to limit participants' awareness of some of the underlying issues presented in the game.

5.2.3.3. What has been learnt about politics in games through the survey

In addition to how participants used the framework and what kind of games they applied, the survey also brought to light several other interesting findings on politics in games, and the framework, in general.

- *Universality*: Based on the initial case studies, the framework allows for the analysis of politics in games regardless of the games' genres. In addition, it is capable of capturing the political content whether it is a prominent element of the game or found in the background

- *Example*: Civilization's overt political gaming system as well as GTA's politics as part of the game's background can both be equally analysed with the framework

- *Prevalence of some methods and areas of politics over others and diversity within themes*: In the case of the case studies, all three games included elements of 'use of force' and military or armed conflict components. The implementation of this method and area was however different between the games. On the one hand this shows the prominence of 'conflict' as a part of many games. On the other hand, it is also is an example of how different one theme or concept can be represented and used between different games. It is an important notion when applying the framework and comparing games.

  - *Example*: The player character in Skyrim is a hero, who has the potential to be a deciding factor in a civil war. Use of force is thus found both through the hero when using weapons, but in the shape of the two civil war factions fighting one another. In GTA, there are also cases of use of force, however these are more in regards to the protagonists fighting for their own interests and eventually in the conflict with different federal information agencies.

- *Politics are one of many layers in a game*. When considering a game's political content, it is important to consider the whole game rather than just smaller parts. Politics are often an additional layer to the overall game structure. Having no knowledge of politics would still make it possible to play most games regardless. In addition, considering the game and its mechanics and narrative enables us to better categorise and contextualise the political elements of a game. Context is important. The framework provides for this to some degree, e.g. by considering a game's goal, however prior understanding of the game as a whole is advised before

using the framework, based on the experience made with the case studies.

- *Examples*: The player character in Skyrim could spend a long time in-game without getting involved with the main civil war story- and quest line and no knowledge of the political situation in Skyrim is needed to play the game per se. They would nevertheless still encounter elements of the two factions on their journey. Understanding the background to the civil war however gives the whole situation a different and deeper meaning.

- *Finding (underlying-) values in games requires some level of awareness of the same*: the framework can help to surface and enables discussions about values found and embedded in the game. However, based on the experience gained through the case studies, some awareness of their general existence is necessary for this in order to be recognised as such.

  - *Example*: The Nords' attitude towards other races and ethnicities not originally found in Skyrim; this can be understood as racism, but without the general awareness of the concept it is just general hostility.

- *Overall freedom and agency of the player seems to be important for political agency also:* Before considering the player's political agency, it seems advisable to also consider the overall ability of the player to change elements and events in the game. The results from the case studies suggest that one is important for the other – and this was confirmed by findings from the survey study.

  - *Example:* Skyrim allows the player to explore the world and influence the outcome of many quests and stories, including the political elements of it. In GTA however, while the player can explore the game world, the main story cannot be changed, and neither can any political elements be influenced.

- *There can be different layers to politics in a game*: Not every political content in a game is the same or of the same importance. It can for example be distinguished between 'need to know' understanding and information about politics that are needed to play a game properly vs. deeper levels of optional or peripheral information that add greater understanding. An alternative way of categorising this could also be through the filter in regards to which political elements the player is most likely to encounter, if something is more in the background or has a more prominent position in the game. Considering the different layers and positions of politics needs to be part of the analysis and any consideration of a game's potential to engage and 'teach' about politics as well in order to fully appreciate the player's experience.

  o *Example*: The above-mentioned civil war in Skyrim is more prominent than the Nords dislike of non-Nords and therefore more likely to catch the player's attention and influence the gaming experience.

  o Related to the above: how well does one have to know a game to use the framework fully and effective? (see discussion below)

- *Politics can be found in almost any setting and unrealistic settings do not need to be a bad thing*. The diversity of settings in the case study games allows for the question of whether the setting of a game matters for its potential political engagement and learning effect. Judging from the case studies, this could not be a barrier to players becoming interested in politics, but things learnt through the game might not be applicable to current political situations. The framework itself allows for analysis of any setting regardless.

  o *Example*: While Skyrim is set in a fantasy world, there is still a detailed political structure and its conflicts are also found in the real world.

5.2.3.4.   On study participants

Aside from their potential contribution to the framework, participants are overall well-educated, given the high numbers of degree holders, with an interest in politics and regular gaming experience, and thus in some ways different to participants from the initial landscaping survey discussed in chapter three. As such they make a good basis to try out the framework's concepts as they are more likely to be familiar with the basic notions of both games and politics and thus more capable of recognising either when facing it in a game, rather than giving vague and incorrect answers.

The study also allows for an interesting insight on their thoughts on politics: while they are well educated and interested in politics, participants are also aware of the limits of how the public can influence the overall political process in their countries (average rating 5.43 on a 10 steps scale) and even more so critical of politicians and their not-caring for people like them (average rating of 3.9). The latter is a reflection of the bad reputations of and the low trust level the public often, has about politicians (*Trust in Professions*, 2017), which is also increasingly found among the well-educated (Dalton, 2005). Though as the differences between certain sub-groups, e.g. male, educated participants that chose a strategy game, show there is some variety between the sample population. While more data on this sub-sample would be necessary, this difference could be attributed to the group being closer to or resembling more what typical politicians are like, e.g. male and well-educated.

Nevertheless, participants still go to vote and participate in the political process in this way. This phenomena has been termed the rise of 'dissatisfied democrats' or 'critical citizens', who hold the values of democracy dear, but are aware and critical of the gap between these values and how they are performed and adhered to in contemporary western democracies (Norris, 1999).

Overall, the survey study showed that non-experts can use the framework to similar levels as more knowledgeable users. It provides a structured approach that can compensate for the lack of knowledge to a good degree. Nevertheless, there is some room for changes and improvements in regard to how the framework, as it was at the time of the survey, is presented to participants. Using the framework enables users to see potentially less visible areas of politics in games, as the stronger awareness of ideologies, messages and personal- as well as group politics shows, all of which were less prominent during the initial landscaping survey discussed in chapter 3. The study further gave us more insights into politics in video games in general. They can, for example, be seen as one of many layers to a game rather than a specific field. Furthermore, fields like conflict and use of force are particularly often found when looking at a game's area and methods of politics. Finally, based on our initial finding there is no one game genre that is particularly more 'political' and realistic in its portrayal than others, which again is a difference from the initial study which preferred strategy games.

5.3. Conclusion

- The framework can be applied to any game, regardless of genre – even if the overall outcome might show that there are no politics in the game

- The framework can be used by expert and lay users alike. There are some slight differences in how the two groups use the framework, but these can be overcome by more extensive explanations and definitions of concepts used

- The initial version of the framework used in the survey study needed some modifications. Problems and issues found through the survey have been accounted for in the current version of the framework as well as further work, as discussed in chapter 6, that build upon the framework

- The framework is doing what it is supposed to do: pin-point politics in a game and give users a way to categorise and compare them. It is not – and not intended to be – a tool to analyse a game as a whole, e.g. regarding what game mechanics and design decisions have been made. While users do not need to be aware of the overall structure of the game and its design, some awareness is good. This is also the reason why the first half of the survey was about general game design elements. The framework itself functions independently from a game's genre and setting, as seen by both case studies and survey responses.

- Linked to the above: the case studies showed that politics is (most often) just a layer in the overall game structure. The framework highlights the 'politics layer' independent and together with other elements of the game. The latter is important to understand the potential effect and the experience 'politics' in the game can create.

- To use the framework effectively, a certain level of familiarity with a game is necessary. This is especially true for political elements that are less obvious such as optional information the player can receive about political elements or underlying values and ideologies. This level of familiarity can be gained by either playing the game, or if that is not possible, through significant amounts of secondary data on the game such videos and wikis. Alternatively, ways to crowd source the necessary information might be considered, e.g. by having several others that have played the game fill out the framework or a questionnaire based on the framework as is the case with the online survey study.

- The same is true for familiarity with the concepts used in the framework, though this can be solved by providing users with definitions and further information.

This chapter sought out to test the Politics in Games framework for its ability to be used as a tool for analysing political elements in games. The case studies

have shown that it is possible to analyse entire games with the framework as opposed to individual elements only, which has been the case in the previous chapter. The studies further found that 'use of force' and/or military-related areas of politics are particularly well represented and many games have some form of underlying values.

These findings were supported by the larger survey study also. Participants chose to analyse over 90 different games, showing that the framework is capable of working for a lot of different games and genres. Use of force/military and values are similarly the most popular forms of politics in the game presented, alongside with power struggles. The survey furthermore confirmed that all sub-categories currently used in the framework are useful. The results also invite the notion to broaden and edit some of the concept descriptions slightly in order to cater for additional concepts such as alliances. Similarly, both pieces of work have brought forward the question of whether a game's setting, e.g. present-day or fantasy universe, should be especially considered in an analysis. When comparing the case study's finding on Skyrim with participants' analyses, overall similar outcomes can be found, which can be seen as an initial expression of the framework's reliability to produce similar outcomes of the same game analysed by different individuals.

Thus, through applying the framework in a number of case studies as well as the general survey, it has been shown that it is indeed possible to comprehensively analyse and discuss politics in video games through using the Politics in Games framework.

There are however some limitations to this as well as potential additions and changes that would improve the process overall.

The survey showed that the overall approach of the framework is approachable and usable by a diverse group of individuals, in regard to age, education as well as interest and knowledge of games and politics. The intensity of critical assessment is however also dependent on the chosen game and its 'politicalness' as well as the user/participant and their interest in

a deeper analysis. Some modifications of and around the framework, e.g. by giving further information and definitions of concepts, could compensate for this.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the survey is very close to the framework, but still an interpretation of it. What can be said about the survey, is thus not necessarily exactly the case for the framework. One example of this is the issue that the survey did not provide explicitly for the case of the game actually not featuring any politics at all. This revealed the dilemma of making users think about and recognise politics, without forcing them to overthink.

Nevertheless, when comparing the way participants saw and recognised politics in games with what was reported in the earlier landscaping survey (chapter 3), it become apparent that they are more aware of personal and group/social politics than before. Thus, one function/task the framework had hoped to achieve was successful: making 'hidden politics' in games more visible. As such the framework is a working thought-provoking tool for this task.

The survey has also provided some interesting data in regard to differences in genres' perceived realism in politics. It has been shown that no genre is particularly more realistic in its presentation, there is thus no one 'political genre' among games. The idea based on observations in the case studies on player's political agency and the prominence and realism of politics in games has been further supported. There is a statistical difference between games providing players with agency with regard to their perceived realism and those who do not. This is further defined by the significant negative correlation between not providing agency and realism score.

The analysis study also brought back into focus what is important for the original research question: political engagement. The previous version of the framework did not support this enough and instead focused too much on game design elements. Doing the survey thus also taught me what needed to

be changed in future (and current) iterations of the framework. In addition to providing the possibility to focus particularly on political engagement, future iterations also need to incorporate the game's designers and their own backgrounds and thus potential biases. The framework is currently mostly game content driven, allowing analysis of a game purely based on one's gaming experience. Involving the designers and developers' perspective however would make it necessary to include other sources outside of the game. Future iterations thus need to consider whether the need to include outside sources outweighs the potential for more holistic analysis.

With the framework's ability to be used as a tool for analysis by a variety of people on a great variety of games, it is now time to consider the other main objective of the framework: being used in generative and creative activities.

This will be considered in the following chapter. Before moving on however, it seems appropriate to point out how the results of the analysis survey have influenced this other main use of the framework - its use for creative and generative purposes, especially game design – in several ways.

First, the modifications made to the framework as a result of the survey had a direct effect on the creative aspect of it. The ideation card set devised from the framework's new structure and its variables are the most prominent result of this. The card deck was also used in the workshops investigating the framework's ability to support creative tasks.

Furthermore, the survey also influenced the workshop's tasks and materials.

Due to potential misunderstandings or having different understandings of political and game design concepts, the decision was made to bring participants to a shared understanding of these concepts through short presentations and group analysis exercises prior to the design exercise. Political aspects were initially discussed separately from game design notions, to prevent the above discussed problem of game design being too dominant

over the political part of the framework. Only once both had been discussed in-depth were they combined. Furthermore, participants were given overview sheets including the most important concepts for both political analysis and game design purposes. In addition, the design task brief was held purposefully open, to be inclusive of the notion that politics can be found in many different forms that can be expressed in a variety of designs. In order to further reduce the danger of misunderstandings, while also trying to invite different perspectives into the process, participants were asked to work in groups on their game designs.

Finally, the last task of the workshop was a feedback exercise, collecting responses on the workshop overall, as well as its materials, the framework and the ideation cards. This was done in the light of the realisation that the survey would have benefitted from participants' assessments also.

Overall, it can be said that many parts of how the framework was tested for supporting creative process were influenced by the experience of the survey and general analyses of games through the framework.

6. The framework as generative and creative tool

Analysing existing games for their political content and characteristics is a useful step towards making politics in games more visible. The next step in pursuing the original research goal of investigating the politics in games and using these insights in order to use video games for political engagement is thus to create games for promoting interest in politics.

To this end, a design tool to aid the creative processes for this was developed in the shape of an ideation card set. This card set as well as the original framework were then used in a game design workshop, investigating their application in generative practices.

6.1. Ideation cards

6.1.1. Making a generative tool out of the framework, initial considerations

At the beginning of the process, was the initial question of how the framework could be used to not only analyse existing games, but also help create new, politically engaging ones. While it may be possible to 'fill out' the framework with appropriate elements, this did not seem to fit well into the usual process of designing and producing games. In addition, it would require significant previous knowledge about game design and politics alike, to use the framework on it appropriately. Therefore, the decision to transform the core principles of the framework into a design tool was taken.

What nature and shape the tool would take was thus the next question to be considered. There were several requirements that had to be fulfilled:

Universal usability:

> The tool should be useable by all possible interested parties, including developers, activists, researchers or interested video game players. Therefore, as little as possible previous knowledge, both about game design and politics, should be necessary to use it. In addition, the overall ease of use was considered in order to overcome the potential of excluding potential users when e.g. using more traditional game development environments that require some level of computational knowledge. This, in addition to the importance of physicality in the design process (Ramduny-Ellis et al., 2010), were contributing factors to decide on a physical tool, rather than a (purely) digital one.

Representing the dual nature of the framework:

> The framework was set out to be used for both analysis and generative activities. Therefore, any design tool based on it, would also need to be able to be used for both, in addition to the above-mentioned ability to be used by different stakeholders.

Ease of production and circulation:

> Given the time and production constrains in developing the tool, any end- and prototypes of it would need to be easy to produce and duplicate. This made more complex technological probes less viable.

Education:

> In addition to not only being of use by a variety of stakeholders, the tools would also need to be able to bridge gaps in (political) knowledge to enable optimal use. Therefore, any tool would also need to have an education aspect to it, to allow for some sort of knowledge transfer to the user.

Based on these requirements, it was decided to develop a card-based design tool using the notion and practice of 'ideation cards'.

6.1.2. Ideation cards – an overview and introduction

As mentioned above, ideation cards are card-based design tools. While the earliest examples of using cards in design tasks date back to the 1950s and Charles and Ray Eames 'The House of Cards' set – a card set designed to aid innovative thinking in design , they have seen a particular increase in popularity in the last decade and half in the in the fields of user experience and human-centred design (Roy & Warren, 2018).

There are several different goals usually pursued when designing and using ideation cards. The most common is that of the 'design aid'. Here prompts are used to facilitate and support users creative thinking processes, may this be through images or text. Rather than being purely association based, it is also possible to use ideation cards as an easy way to convey information or specific knowledge in a short, concise form. While this is usually thought of as mostly factual, it can also be used to present user with different design methods or discuss best practices in a field, which in turn influence the design process overall. Finally, they can also be used to address and overcome typical problems in the design process or specific domains through featuring solutions on the cards themselves (Darzentas et al., 2019).

There are thus three distinctive use cases for ideation cards. First, there is the creative or generative aid aspect to ideation cards. The second is using cards for analytical purposes, e.g. when considering the viability of an idea or design, vis-à-vis different challenges and situations. Finally, they are used as a way to relay information in a compact and concise matter. All three characteristics are in line with the initial considerations of what the design should be capable of achieving.

In the literature, the argument has been repetitively made that card-based tools have various advantages over other types of media in aiding design. As part of this, studies have shown that using these cards contrary to not using them allows for further developed, more creative and diverse designs (Daly et al., 2012; Yilmaz et al., 2011). Users and supervisors have reported more

effective communication between one another and an increase in the ability to focus on a given topic. They have furthermore been found helpful in mapping out projects and approaches in a team context as well as when explaining plans and ideas to other stakeholders (Baldwin, 2011).

6.1.3. Developing the ideation card set

When starting the process of creating an ideation card set from the framework, the initial idea was to turn every variable for the framework (method, area etc.) into different card suits or decks. When using the cards, one card out of each deck would be drawn by the user. However, it became clear that simply turning the framework into cards on a 1:1 basis would not be feasible for a variety of reasons.

The first issue that came up in this regard, was that that the framework as it was had too many variable types. This would lead to having too many card types with each having very few individual cards each, making the ideation process potentially cluttered and confusing. This was solved by reducing the overall types of cards through collapsing all variables from the Engagement Side (Set 1) of the framework (Agency, Form, and Knowledge) into one category called 'Engagement', with each of their sub-themes and potential values represented. This resulted in four categories overall: Engagement, Area, Method and Goals.

Issue number two was the awareness that most commercially available and developed games, based on prior analyses as discussed in Chapter 4, have varying numbers of purely political elements, especially when it comes to the elements for engagement. Some are more visible than others, if they exist at all. This was accommodated by including blank cards, that could be used in the case of a category not being applicable to a specific game or alternatively treated as a joker for users to fill in their own ideas.

This also opened up another question about the underlying characteristics and purpose of the ideation cards. Should they be purely to help create, and analyse games that set out to promote engagement with a political topic or instead be open towards also developing games with politics in them, without the primary aim to create engagement. Given the framework's purpose of analysing any kind of video game, and then help determine the game's ability to help engagement afterwards, it seemed inappropriate to limit the applications of the card set. Instead, it was decided to potentially mark out a subset of cards that were especially good for promoting (political) engagement that users could use when interested or let them know in advance which cards and thus concepts would be particularly useful.

Similarly, it was also likely that not all variable values from the framework and thus the equivalent card, may be relevant for some form of activism. It was therefore agreed that the set when ready to be tested, should be given to both individuals with varying activism and politics backgrounds, as well those without any such prior engagements as well as a diverse prior knowledge of games and game design to make sure they were both universally useable, without being too general to be of use for experts-in-their-fields-type users.

Finally, a particular problem was the framework's goal variable. In its current iteration as of the time when the cards were developed, it was considered in three different stages, ranging from objective descriptions to considering the political implications of it. Including three different goal sets would again lead to undesired clutter and bloating of both the card set as well as the ideation process. One proposed solution to this situation was, similar to the Engagement category, to collapse the elements of 'goal' into one card suit, resulting in a bigger category overall. The more specific levels of analysis, considering how political a goal would be, could then be done afterwards through an additional ideation set or exercise.

Furthermore, again considering the reality of many games as discussed in chapter 4, it was decided that the 'rules' of using the ideation cards should allow for users choosing more than one card per suit, if they wish to do so.

While this could possibly cause the ideation process to become too complex, keeping it closer to the standard characteristics of many games as well as not limiting users' creativity through prescribing a fixed number of cards to use, were all seen as the more desirable outcomes in the development process.

6.1.4. The finished 'Politics in Games' ideation card set

The final version of the 'Politics in Games' ideation card set has a total of 36 cards spread over four categories or suits of cards, 'Engagement', 'Area', 'Method' and 'Goal'. Individual cards in each category were created both based on which elements existed in the framework as well as informed by the variables test study discussed in chapter 4 (see table 30).

Card Type (and associated colour/suit)	Individual Cards	Number of cards
Engagement	Form: Institutional Form: Informal Agency Knowledge Implicit Knowledge Factual Knowledge Values Blank Card (Engagement)	7
Area	Social Issues Level of Politics Personal Level of Politics Local Level of Politics National Level of Politics International Economics Justice Transport Trade Environment Military and Defence Blank Card (Area)	12
Method	Bribery Campaigning Use of Force Negotiations Espionage Policy and Law Making Protest Spending and distributive powers	9

	Blank Card (Method)	
Goal	Progress Be the First of Best World Domination Simulation Survival Blank Card (Goals) Resource acquisition and growth Puzzle solving	8
Total		36

Table 30 Cards types and individual cards in the ideation card set

The cards' prototypes were developed using Acrobat InDesign, with the central information of each card being saved on and read from a .csv file. Each card had a title, larger image and text explaining the concept on them. Images for each card were chosen both based on what was considered fitting to the framework, while also being unique from other cards and available for use in a purely non-commercial, academic setting. Each set was given a different colour both on the front and back of the cards, to distinguish between the different categories. Engagement cards were blue, Area ones orange-red, Method cards green and Goal cards yellow (see figure 44). The prototypes were printed on paper in order to allow for easier later adjustments based on insights and feedback from the design workshop.
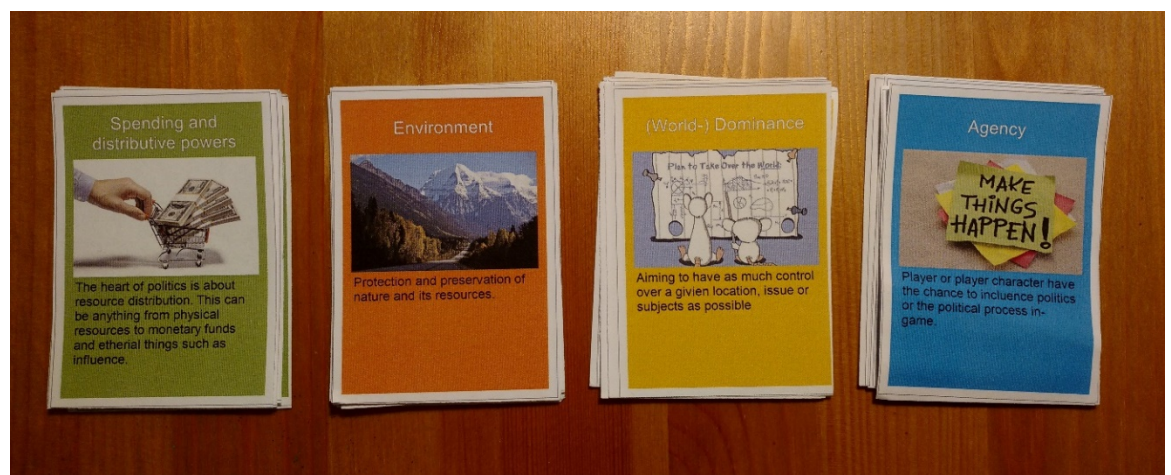

Figure 44 Prototypes of the Politics in Games ideation card set

6.2. Designing political engaging games – A Game Design Workshop

With the framework being turned into a more hands-on card-based design tool, the next step was to test its abilities in supporting the creative process of game design development. To this end, a game design workshop was put together and facilitated.

6.2.1. Workshop goals, set-up and tasks

From the outset the game design workshop had a series of goals and aims at its foundation and set-up. The main goal, as mentioned above, was to investigate the use of the framework and the card-based design tool based on it in a creative and generative environment. Based on this, the subsequent goal was to develop game ideas for politically engaging games, moving away from the notion of solely analysing games for their political content and their potential to cause an interest in political themes and topics in the players.

At the same time, again similarly to the original outset of this research and the framework alike, there was also the aim to make politics in games more visible and increase participants' awareness of their existence. Concurrently, this also meant to familiarise them with how video games can be used as tools of engagement in a variety of ways.

Linked to the overall drive to raise awareness of politics in games, the workshop also sought to create discussions and catch participants' notions about politics and games, similar to the original landscaping survey study discussed in chapter 3, as well as, as a by-product, create additional analyses of popular games through the framework.

Finally, as part of examining the creative process of developing game ideas for politically engaging games, it was anticipated to learn more about the design process itself, any design related interactions that would occur and how both

were influenced by the provided tools as well other potential factors (Löwgren & Stolterman, 2004).

The workshop took place at the University of Nottingham's Mixed Reality Lab and was repeated three times, with different participants each time. While the first half was focused on group discussions with all participants, they would split up into smaller groups for the second half. Given the potentially sensitive nature of politics and activism for some participants, the workshops were run with a 'safe space' policy, in order to allow everyone involved to speak freely without having to fear repercussions for voicing a different or unpopular opinion.

At the start of the workshop, and after an initial round of introductions, participants were asked to talk about their associations of three different topics: politics, (video-) games and 'politics and video games'. Participants were free to answer this either through individual concepts and words or longer explanations and elaborations of the points they raised. This was on the one hand meant as an ice breaker exercise, but on the other hand also established a baseline on which participants found themselves before learning more about the topics at hand or designing a game.

The second part of the workshop was a combination of group discussion and knowledge transfer. Participants were familiarised with the basic notions and concepts surrounding (video-) games and game design as well as (comparative) politics and sources of political engagement as found in the political science literature. Participants were then asked to discuss and analyse a game and a political situation or institution of their choice as a group. This was done using and revealing the characteristics and elements talked about earlier in the exercise.
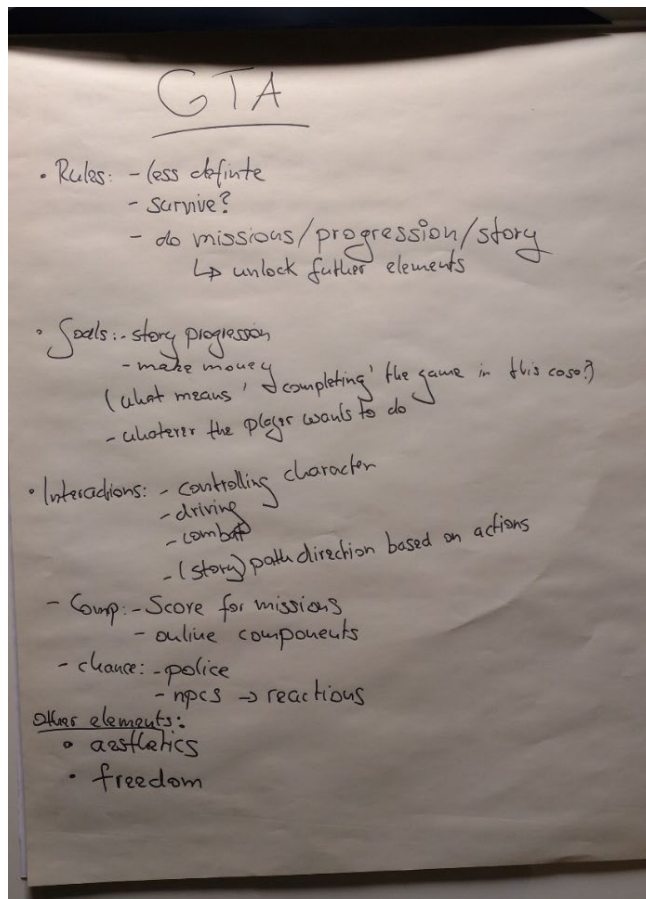
Figure 45 Notes from analysing the game design elements of 'Grand Theft Auto' during workshop 1

Once both aspects, politics as well as games, were discussed thoroughly, the group moved to the notion of putting both together. This was done through introducing participants to the 'Politics in Games' framework. Further familiarisation with the framework and its concepts was achieved through another group analysis task. This time participants were asked to analyse a game of their choice through the lens of the framework (see figure 45). They were free to use the same game that was used earlier or choose another game entirely. Finally, the ideation card set based on the 'politics in games' framework was introduced to participants as a means for both analysis and generative activities.

The main activity however was part 3 of the workshop. This was a design exercise asking participants to create a game including politics and political engagement for an issue or activist activity of their choice. This was done alone or in groups of up to three depending on participants' preferences. The

design of the game was done in several stages. The copies of the ideation card set and the Politics in Games framework as well as design cues and work sheets provided by the workshop facilitator helped in scaffolding and guiding the design process for participants. No technical knowledge about programming games was necessary (Fullerton, 2018).

Initially, designers were asked to consider the basic premises for their game. These included themes and issue they wished to feature, a setting, the goal of the game and the overall 'story' they planned to tell. This basis set-up was then added to in the second step of the design process, which focused on encouraging participants to decide on more specific game mechanics and the overall game flow. This was again done through several pages of design cues in the shape of questions on different (general) aspects of games, e.g. about the number of players, genre and others (see figure 46). Please see the appendix for the complete design cues and task sheet. Participants were free to decide which additional elements they would include to further their overall design idea. After this or concurrent to it, participants were asked to prepare a visual presentation of their game design on a A3 poster provided through the facilitator.

Initial considerations and ideas | Building up the idea | Putting it all together
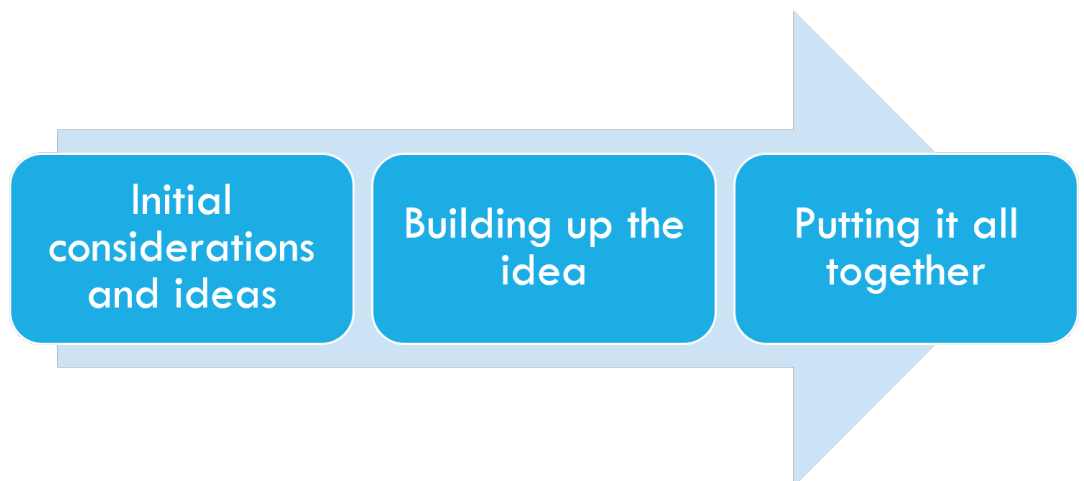
Figure 46 The three main stages of the game design process as shown on the workshop slides

This would then be used to prepare and utilised in the next and final step of the design process. Here individual groups were asked to pitch and present their final designs to the other workshop participants. Participants were asked

to explain the game, give examples of the game flow and discuss the politics included in their design. Other than that, they were free to pitch their game in any shape or form they chose.

The workshop would then finish with a round of written and oral feedback from participants on the workshop. The distributed feedback sheets included questions how the workshop had influenced participants' awareness and understanding of politics and games, the workshop overall and whether used materials such as the framework and ideation cards would be perceived as useful.

Participants were given a variety of different kinds of materials to use in the game design process. These included the initial design tasks, also referred to as design cues, with questions that allowed the process to be scaffolded. There was furthermore a set of ideation cards for each group that were developed based on the previously devised and discussed 'Politics in Games' framework. The cards were divided between four different suits or types of cards, representing different elements of the framework: engagement, methods, area and goals (of the game). Please refer to the section on ideation cards above on the process of developing the set. Participants were furthermore given a short version of the framework, which was discussed in-depth as part of the workshop. In order to cater for participants who had no or very little experience with both game design and political concepts, 'cheat sheets' including the most important aspects and concepts of these, based on what was discussed earlier in the workshop, were available. Finally, groups received large poster sized sheets of paper on which to illustrate their designs and various stationary including colourful felt-tip pens, markers, colourful post-its, scissors, blu-tak and glue. There was no predicated way as to how the designs should be put on the posters. Apart from the actual task sheets including design clue questions, participants were thus free to use any materials they chose.

6.2.2. Participants and groups

There were 19 participants in total, distributed between nine groups among the three runs of the workshop. 15 participants were male, four were female. Their age range from early 20s to mid-40s. Participants came from over 11 different countries (see table 31). 6 participants came from the UK, 3 from Greece. The other 10 participants came from a different country each. Please refer to table 2 for exact statistic on participants' nationalities.

Country of origin	Number of Participants	Groups in which these can be found
United Kingdom	6	1,2,6,7,
Greece	3	1,5,7
Mexico	1	1
Brazil	1	3
Rumania	1	4
Italy	1	6
Ireland	1	9
Bulgaria	1	7
Singapore	1	8
Indonesia	1	8
Denmark	1	8
Unknown	2	2, 9

Table 31 Participants' nationalities

Workshop 1 had five participants which former two groups, one with two and one with three members (group 1 and group 2) (see table 32).

Workshop 2 had three participants who all preferred to work on their own (group, 3, group 4 and group 5).

Finally, workshop 3 had 11 participants. These formed three groups with three participants each (group 6, group 7 and group 8) as well as one group of two participants (group 9).

Workshop	Group Number	Group Size	Participants' Genders
1	1	2	2m
	2	3	3m
2	3	1	1m
	4	1	1m
	5	1	1f
3	6	3	2m 1f

	7	3	2m 1f
	8	3	3m
	9	2	1m 1f

Table 32 Group sizes and gender distributions

A requirement for participating in the workshop was either participants' engagement in a form of activism or other political activity or alternatively a personal interest in politics or video games. Recruitment happened through electronic communication with university based political and activist societies and organisations as well as other means such as publishing the call for participants on appropriate websites and social media outlets.

Participants had varying degrees of engagement with different forms of activism. While some were highly involved in a range of activities including party and issue related politics and activism, others would only follow the news/stay generally informed and took part in the political process through using their right to vote only. Three participants also engaged with politics on a more professional and academic level. Most participants had at one point in their life engaged in playing video games, so a basic knowledge of the thematic and mechanics existed. Many however had stopped playing video games when becoming older or due to other commitments and responsibilities. This, and the age range between participants, made discussing more recent gaming titles in the groups at times more challenging. Three participants had either a formal education background in video game design and/or used game design as part of their work. Three participants had an educational background in political science. Participants' backgrounds will be further discussed below in connection to how these influenced the design process, material usage and the final game design.

6.2.3. Methodology

As discussed above, the workshop itself consisted of a group discussion and knowledge dissemination part and, at its centre, a design exercise, followed by feedback on both.

The main output of the workshop were nine game designs and either individual representations on A3 paper individually designed by each group. In addition, there are the audio recordings of the all the workshops, totalling over 15 hours. These recordings were later transcribed for further analysis. There were furthermore photos taken during the design process by the facilitator and participants' notes from the workshop, some on scrap paper, some added to the provided handouts. As well as notes taken by the facilitator during the group discussions and feedback forms filled out by participants at the end of the workshop.

The workshops' transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis with specific focus on design interactions between group members. To further this, thick descriptions of some of the groups' design work were written. When doing the thematic analysis, categories related to workshop and design elements as well as participants' background – thus representing internal and external factors – were of particular interest and thus the focus of the analysis. In addition, individual groups' use of materials, especially the Politics in Games framework and the ideation card set, were recorded to detect patterns in their use as well as to compare these to the overall interactions in the design process and to what participants would write in their feedback forms.

6.2.4. Results – Generated Designs

The workshop's main output, as discussed above, are the nine different game designs generated by participants. The following is an overview of each group's game design, the theme and issues included as well as a note on what materials were used. Game designs are listed according to group number and workshop.

Grant Theft Vote (Group 1)

Figure 47 Game Design Poster for 'Grand Theft Vote' (Group 1)

This designed (see figure 47) was created in the first of the three runs of the design workshop. In Grand Theft Vote the player takes on the role of an election campaign manager in a context of national elections coming up in a Western democratic country. Their overall goal is thus to make voters support their candidate. This can be done with legal or more unsavoury methods, wherein the focus of the game is on the latter. These include methods such as bribery, coercion and espionage. The two participants themselves fittingly referred to the game as an "election rigging game".

Players are thus given the agency to potentially influence the political landscape of the game world. This is represented through the area control mechanism and overview featured that represents the country divided into its individual constituencies. Players further their influence by winning territory in the shape of constituencies. The campaigning, influencing and rigging itself is done through Grand Theft Auto inspired missions set in an open 'sandbox' style world. The game is also arguably featuring elements of role-play games and simulations. Through doing wrong, or at least very questionable things, the game is supposed to have two different effects on the player. On the one hand side, it is supposed to make the players feel bad about their actions. Thus, appealing to their emotional and ethical side. On the other hand, it is also to inform players about ways how elections can be rigged and manipulated. To this end, methods of influencing and scenarios are associated with real-life case which the player will be introduced to throughout the game. Education is thus used to engage the player, raise awareness and connect the game world it the real world.

Participants used design cues, ideation cards as well as their own knowledge of game design gained from formal education and on personal experience as well as politics based on personal interest. The poster was meant to be in the style of an advertisement telling potential players what the game and game play would offer. It also depicted the game flow of the game, with 'feeling bad yet?' as an expression of the anticipated emotional outcome for the player. The world view of the player character is furthermore illustrated by the

'justice' ideation card being turned upside down, and thus on its head and no longer in order. Participants therefore not only used the ideation cards not only for flashing out parts of the game, but also to express their game idea, with additional notes, on the poster.

From Day2Day (Group 2)

Figure 48 Game Design Poster for 'From Day2Day' (Group 2)

In its broadest sense 'From day2day' (see figure 48) is a game about everyday life, if not actually a simulation. It focuses on people's mundane everyday tasks with special life events and goals in-between and as long-term overall objectives. These include getting an education, a job, finding a place to live and others. It was another game idea produced as part of the first run of the design workshop.

The player moves his or her character in a virtual world akin to the one in Grand Theft Auto. Activities are implemented the form of mini games. The dynamics of interacting with the game world as well as overall difficulty of the game changes with the player's choice of character and overall setting of the world. Available player characters are from different ethnic, socio-economic and gender backgrounds. As such this 'game of life' is easiest when the player chooses the male, middle-class British person. A medium level is a working-class female character, whereas the game is the hardest when playing as an immigrant who is barely capable of speaking English. Every character has a different amount of possible abilities and action they can use to reach their goals in life, e.g. (financial) support from family, the wider community as well as the general workings of the institutions and society as a whole.

The overall goal for the designers of the game was to show politics in everyday mundane task and how politics can influence some of the most basic aspects of everyday life. This way the player is supposed to become more aware of implicit (political) values embedded in the mundane, making them more explicit through interacting with the game world. Similarly, designers foresaw the inclusion of both elements of traditional left- and right-wing policies and ideologies to illustrate differences and potential effects. This was inspired by design participants' experience with political online quizzes that were to inform about one's political positions vis-à-vis established categories and party lines as well as one participant's engagement in 'Access to Justice' programmes. In addition, it was also planned to change the overall political setting, e.g. rather than a liberal democracy, players could play in a totalitarian or communist version of the same world.

The overall design idea behind the game was to engage players through the familiarity with the mundane and in the process make them more aware of the overall structures in society and institutions. As such it incorporates elements of role-play games, puzzles as part of the mini games, simulation, (everyday) survival, all in an open-world sandbox style setting.

Participants made use of ideation cards and the design cues in the design process. Grand Theft Auto that inspired some of the game was previously discussed and analysed in the workshop. The group's knowledge about games was based on personal gaming experience, whereas their knowledge about politics was both stemming from personal interest and the above-mentioned volunteering activities.

Environment City (Group 3)
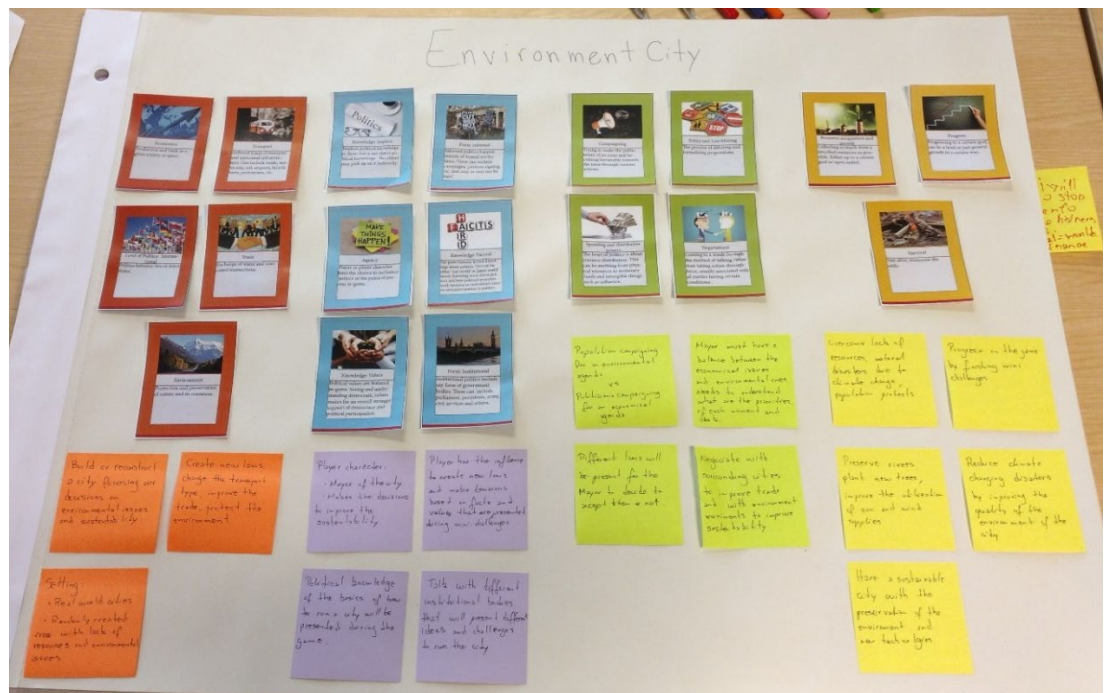
Figure 49 Game Design Poster for 'Environment City' (Group 3)

Environment City (figure 49) is a simulation game in which the player takes on the role of town's mayor. In this position he or she has to build and plan their city and help to contribute to its continuous growth. When doing so, there is a conflict between the growth and economic success vis-à-vis sustainability of one's action and growth as well as environmental protection. It was created during the second run of the workshop.

The game was inspired by the classic game 'Sim City', where the player is also the mayor of a small town and has to help growth while also keeping an eye on citizen's needs and economic outcome. The environment was however

only a minor concern originally, which is where Environment City differs significantly.

Environment City's underlying message which is built into the game and also the long-term knowledge and education goal of the game, is that sustainability and sustainable action are in the long-term, better for both planet and town inhabitants. Environment City tries to engage players with its core theme through putting it in a common and well-known setting, while changing certain parameters considerably. It puts sustainability and the effects of environmental pollution and destruction – e.g. in the shape of special events such as disasters – in a more Western and urban context. This is done consciously in order to bring it closer to player's 'home' rather than something that is happening abroad and/or is considered as something of lower importance than economic growth.

In the design process, the designing participant made extensive use of the design cues, answering the question in order, then looked through the ideation cards to find fitting cards and put these on the poster. Additional notes on post-its and on the design cues sheet itself further showed the rationale behind the design. While having limited prior knowledge about game design, the design process was mostly informed by the participant's own interest and passion about politics and the topic itself.

World Goals (Group 4)

Figure 50 Game Design Poster for 'World Goals' (Group 4)

'World Goals' (see figure 50) is a third person Role Play Game that is also part simulation. The game puts the player in the role of a group of individuals that try to oppose a problematic government with autocratic tendencies. Its initial setting in the real, close to present, US after Donald Trump won the presidential elections, though the exact setting can be changed to represent any other kind autocratic, totalitarian or less undemocratic government coming into a position of power. It was design during the second of the three workshops.

Rather than altogether toppling the government, the game's goal is to prevent the government from subverting existing democratic structures as well as making the world overall a better place – though what the latter is entailing is not completely sure. Depending on which character or class the player chooses at the beginning of the game, they have slightly different abilities and locations they can take actions in. Roles include being a volunteer, an activist, a 'do-gooder' and being a saboteur in a military milieu. Players start on a grassroot level and build up their range and level of operation through different actions and tasks that will gain them prestige

point that in course can be invested in their activities. This is done as a raise against the clock and the AI opponent which concurrently tries to influence and engage the country's citizens in its favour as well.

While mainly a solo experience, the designer also had the idea of offering a (massively) multiplayer online version of the game, in which different human players can band together in their opposition against the AI government.

The game at its core is an educational tool to teach players how to oppose autocratic governments and start to have a say and influence the political process. The Trump administration setting was chosen to make players more aware of the real-life implications and possibilities of what is or could happen and thus make them more engaged with the politics in the real life.

The participant designers started the design process with a general game idea and then went through the ideation cards to find supporting elements. The design cues were used also, but more on a checklist basis. The overall rationale was then visualised through the cards and additional notes on the poster. As such, the poster went through two different iterations to better represent the designer's idea of the game. Any knowledge of game design stemmed from the participant's personal experience with video games. Political understanding was informed by personal interest as well as membership in a political non-governmental organisation in Romania.

Debtopia (Group 5)
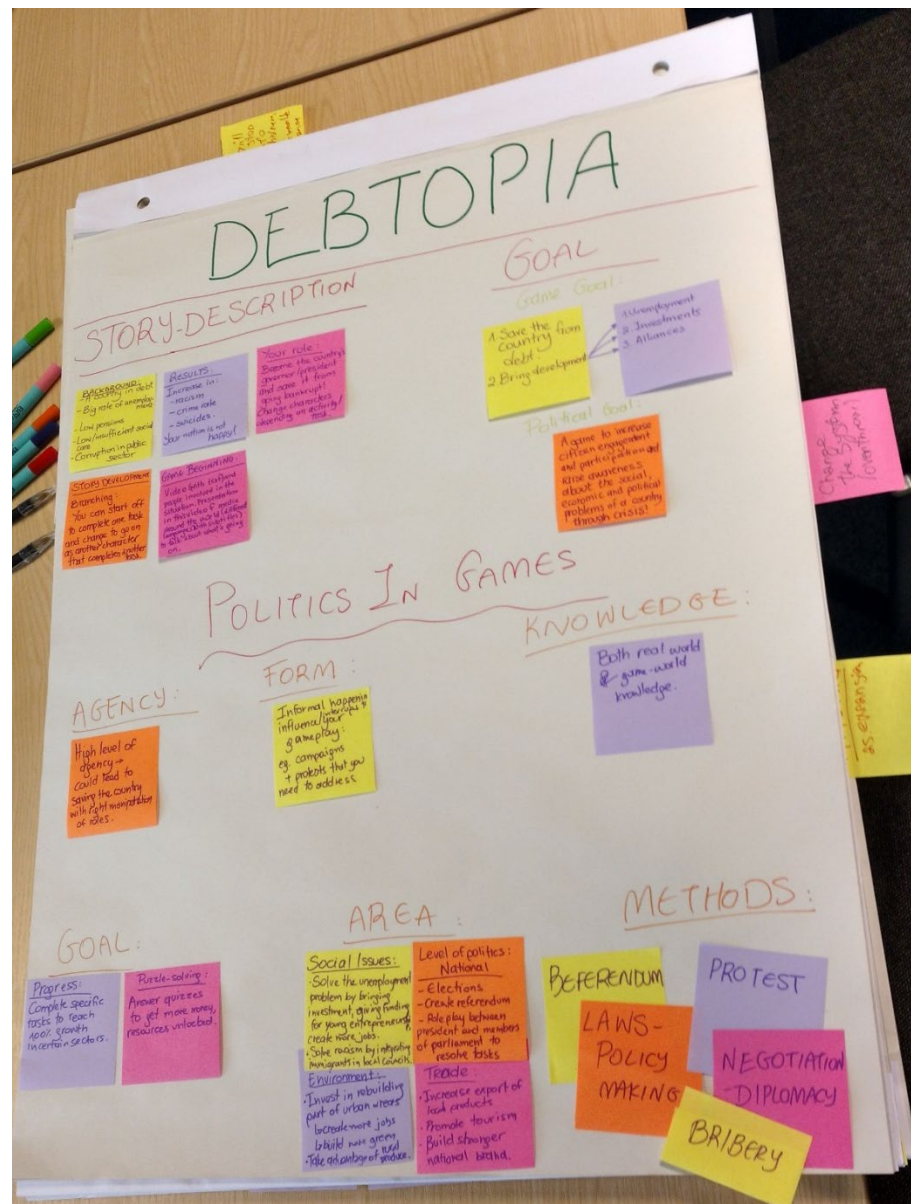
Figure 51 Game Design Poster for 'Debtopia' (Group 5)

'Debtopia 'is a political institution roleplay game that was designed as part of the second run of the design workshop. The game's setting is modelled on Greece during the financial crisis in the early 2010s. The player is a put into the position of the government of a state struggling with high levels of sovereign debt and its associated consequences.

The game has two main goals in-game. First the player needs to overcome the ongoing debt problems of the country. Once this situation has been improved, they need to address and solve all the other issues that have arisen

in the country due to its sovereign debt and any cuts in spending that developed as a consequence of it, e.g. high unemployment, lacking social care, corruption, social unrest and battered international relations.

The player takes on different roles of government officials depending on which aspects of those problems is being addressed. The planned effect on the player is that they become more engaged into the institutional, while also developing more sympathy with the people living in situations such as existed in Greece. The latter is hoped to be achieved by including various other perspectives from individuals experiencing the consequences of extreme sovereign debt, while also providing an international perspective through the use of international media extracts.

It's interesting to note that this group did not put any of the actual ideation cards on the poster (see figure 51) – it is the only one group not having done so. Instead some concepts were written on the poster directly. Overall, the designer focused more on using the original 'Politics in Games' framework and design cues, only using the cards for additional ideas. While game design knowledge was based on limited personal and family-based experience, the group had both formal education in the area of politics and international relation as well as some experience in working for non-governmental organisations.

Likes & Lies (Group 6)

Figure 52 Game Design Poster for 'Likes & Lies' (Group 6)

This game changed quite dramatically in the course of design process in workshop 3. Originally, it was supposed to be a game of empires vs empires with a random allocation of resources and influence. At the start of the game, players would be allocated an identity, not knowing if they would belong to the 'better offs' or poor countries, which would only emerge through further game play. This idea however fell through and a new game design was developed.

Due to the lack of time remaining as a result of having started to develop another game, some of the details for the game were not completely implemented. Nevertheless, the basic notion and in which direction they were supposed to head is there (see figure 52 for the draft poster)

The overall theme for 'Likes and lies' is at times an uneasy relationship between social media content and the truth. Players write commentary content to events and post these on a game-internal social media engine. They gain social capital or -credit points from shares and likes of these posts.

However, when these are found to be lies they lose points – unless they play a role where this is part of their task and then any lies shared and likes will increase their points.

The group was not sure whether this was supposed to be more a fun or a serious game, as this would influence and be influenced by the underlying ethics and values they wanted to embed in the game.

The group used materials such as the game cues and the ideation cards as well as doodles on their poster and during the design process to discuss and further their ideas. Members of the group had previous professional experience in conceptualising games and design as well as the discussions surrounding social media use and trust in internet news stories. They furthermore shared a personal interest in politics.
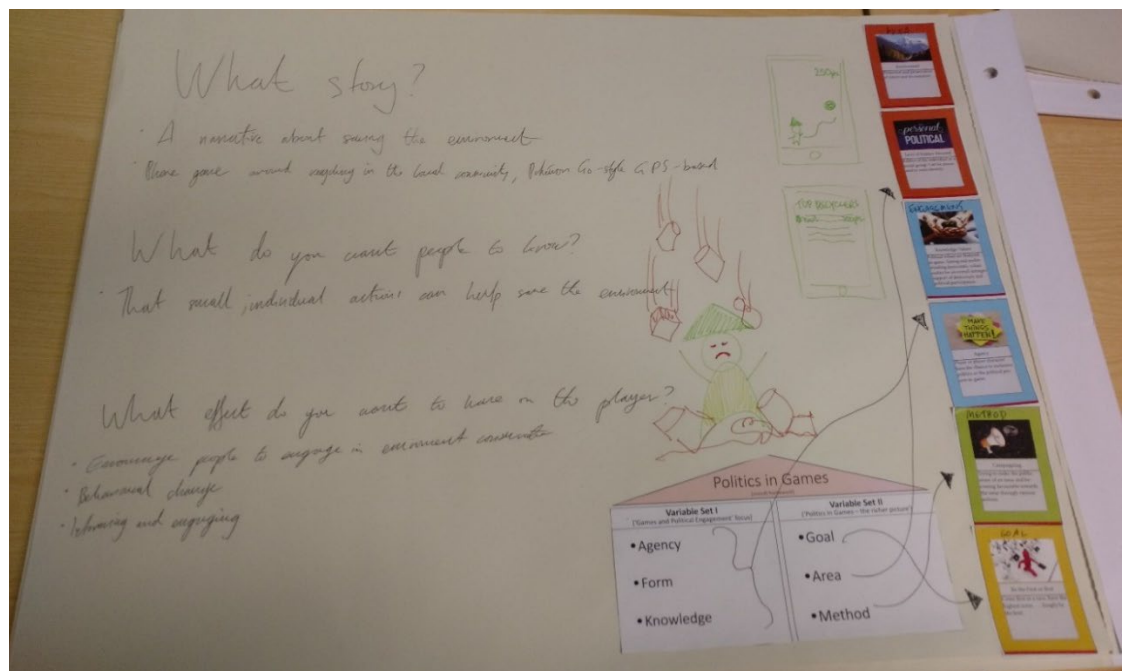
Buried Alive (Group 7)

Figure 53 Game Design Poster for 'Buried Alive' (Group 7)

'Buried Alive' (figure 53) is a mobile phone game based around the theme of recycling, produced in workshop 3. Participants' overarching goal was to make players more interested and pro-actively into recycling. For this purpose

and in order to make it more personally tailored towards each player, the game uses the mobile device's GPS signal. Through this, the local recycling points and regulations are determined and presented to the player.

If a user is then going to those locations and recycles items, this is put into the app and points are gained. These vary between materials and difficulty of recycling certain materials. Points go towards a personal and regional high score.

In order to encourage players to continuously recycling, the app also features an avatar who reminds them to do so. If no recycling has been happening for a prolonged time, the avatar will become unhappy, start sitting in- and will be literally 'rained on' with rubbish, until being 'buried alive' by it. Any recycling intervention will prevent and improve the situation.

Participants agreed on an overall theme very soon after starting to work together. How exactly the theme – environmental protection and recycling – was supposed to be handled was however more complicated and took some time. In the end, participants used the poster both as a way to show case their game/app idea through drawings of screenshots as well as a way to answer some of the design task questions on paper. They were the only group to give more detailed notions of show what the UI and screen in general would look like. The ideation cards were used to sound out the exact details and methods used in the game. Finally, they used the politics in games framework to double check that their ideas would work out as planned. One member had a formal education background in politics, while another had used video game in a previous degree project. The other two group members had personal experience in game also.

Untitled Game (Group 8)
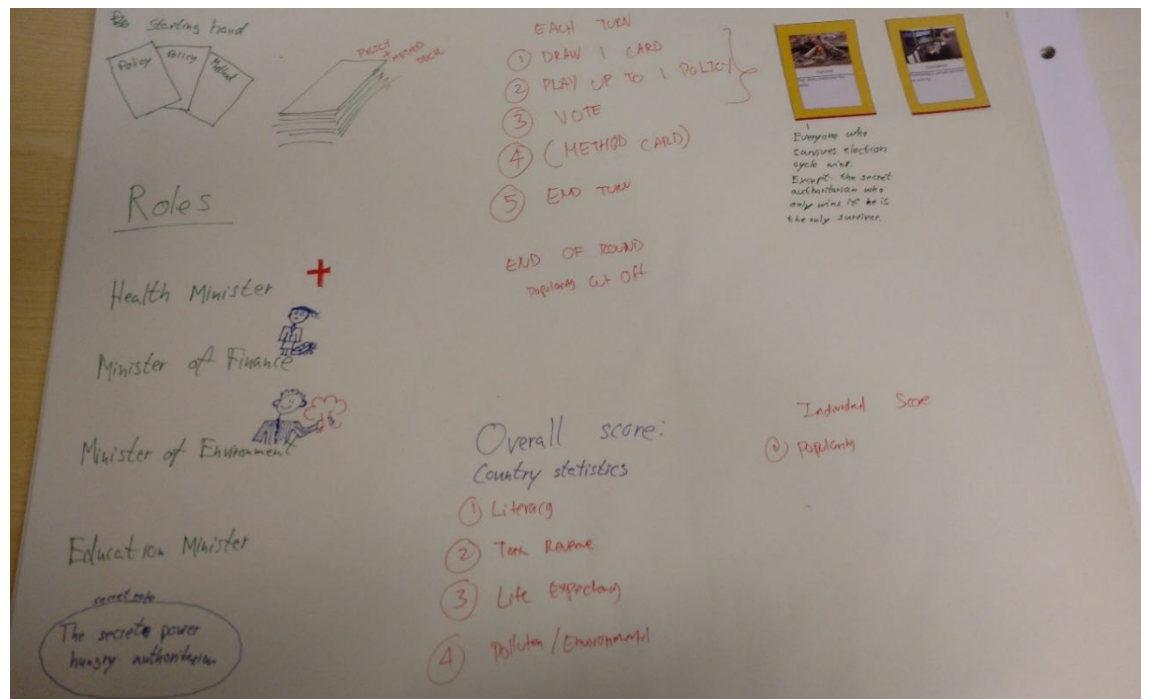
Figure 54 Game Design Poster for 'Untitled Game' (Group 8)

This untitled game design is a simulation of institutional politics (see figure 54), specifically it deals with the policy and law-making process and how members of government have to at some time find agreements and compromises between themselves. It was designed as part of the 3rd game design workshop. Each player takes on the role of a different member of government, the Minister of Health, Minister of Finance, Minister of Economics and the Minister of Education. Each player has their own personal goals, which are both policy and personal influence related, with the end goal to become prime minister eventually. Therefore, public opinion is an important measure of success in the game. Players must negotiate policy acts with different players, which are then voted on. Negotiations and compromises are thus important elements of the game. Contrary to all other games, this particular one was initially devised to be a board or card game, which can also work as digital game.

Participants made a lot of use of their own knowledge of games and their personal experience of playing them. This was then used to systematically go

through the design cues and their associated questions, which were discussed in the group. Certain game elements changed throughout the overall game design process. One of the group members also had a formal education background in political science. Even though all ideation cards were used during the discussions, only two of a single category, goals, made it onto the final design poster, which is one of the unique traits of this game design and presentations vis-à-vis other groups.

Man with no name AKA Crystal Dome (Group 9)
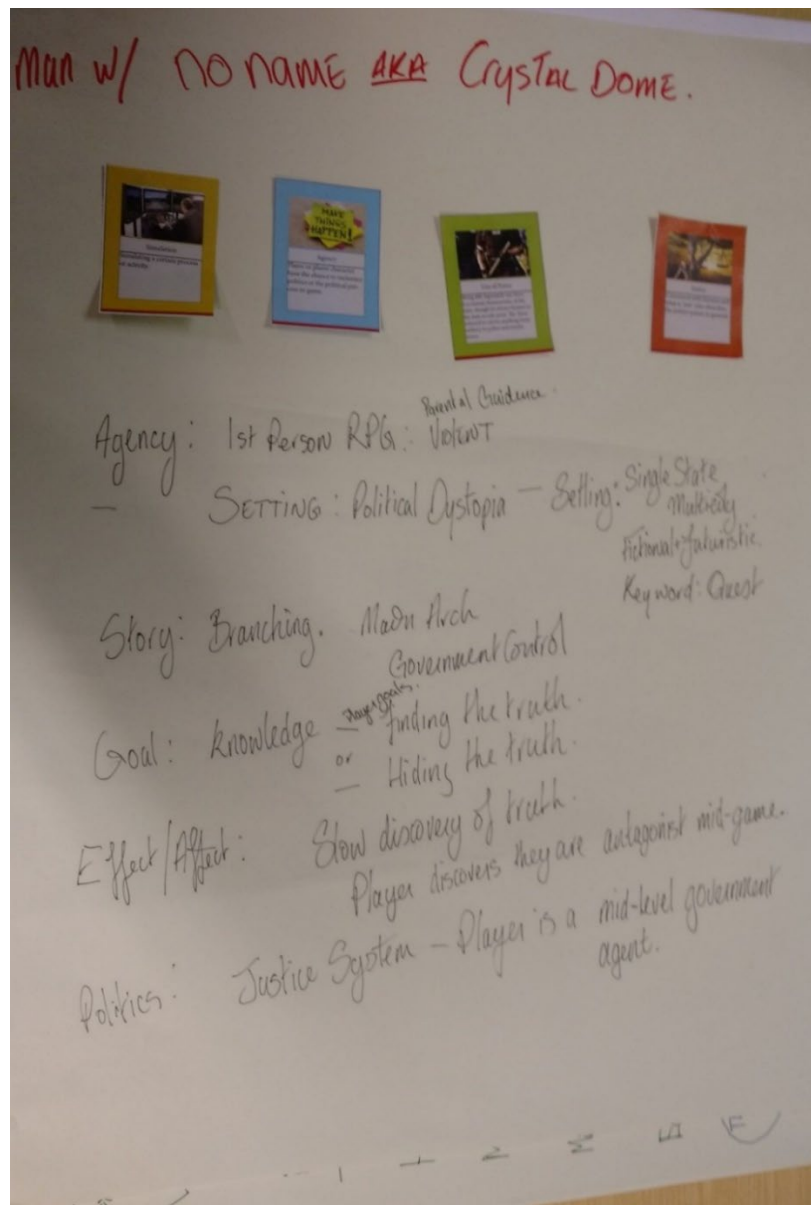
Figure 55 Game Design Poster for 'Man with not name AKA Crystal Palace'' (Group 9)

'Man with no name / Crystal Dome' is a first person adventure RPG in which progress is measured through completing various quests (see figure 55). It is set in a futuristic dystopian state/city area fittingly called Dystopia. It was one of the games developed as part of third run of the game workshop.

The protagonist is an un-named mid-level government agent. The game is very narrative focused and provides the player with various options that will influence the progression of the story and the overall ending of the game. As part of this, the player learns the truth that he is actually the 'antagonist' of the setting, spying for the government and trying to maintain the authoritarian status quo. Once this moment of self-awareness is reached, the player can make decisions that will either further the quest for finding out the truth and help rebels who fight against the government or continue to maintain the status quo including any potential repercussions from either side.

This group mostly decided on the elements of the games based on their own interests (including studying the setting as part of a Literature degree) and the game cues. The ideation cards were also used, but less prominently. The choices of which ones to use on the poster was done on the basis of finding one of each suit that represented the game idea best, whereas other designs used more than one card per card category. As barely visible on the above photo, this group also had an additional poster which was used for initial idea collection and drafting of the game. This was then used for the cleaned up and final version of the poster. Group 9 was the only group to do so to this extent.

Overview of the designed games

Group	Game Title	Theme	Basic Idea	Other
1	Grand Theft Vote	Election manipulation	Be a campaign manager and try to influence voters in your favour with any means necessary	Inspired by discussion previous to design exercise? (GTA 5)
2	From Day2Day	Politics in everyday life / different socio-economic backgrounds	Be successful in achieving various life goals – difficulty depends on character background	Inspired by discussion previous to design exercise? (GTA 5) and online political systems
3	Environment City	Protection of the environment and sustainable growth	Be a mayor of a city and try to grow it in a sustainable way	Inspired by Sim City
4	World Goals	Grass roots activism growing into something bigger	Fight against an autocratic government using a variety of activist methods and save democracy	Game idea was in existence before cards were used
5	Debtopia	Sovereign debt and its effects	Be the government of a debt-ridden country and try to overcome the situation while also keeping social repercussions in mind	Inspired by the 2010s Greek financial crisis
6	Likes & Lies	Social media and the truth	Post commentary on events on social media, gain social capital for more likes and shares, but be careful not to be found out lying about stuff (maybe)	Design unfinished
7	Buried Alive	Recycling	Location dependent mobile game that encourages players to recycle	Mobile game/app
8	untitled	Institutional politics and influence	Institutional politics simulation with ministers fighting for	Card/board game

			influence and popularity	
9	Man with no name / Chrystal Palace	Dystopian politics and the role of the individual	A government agent learns that he is the 'bad guy' and now has to decide: will he continue to help maintain the status quo or pursue the truth?	Narrative focus

Table 33 Overview of the designed games and their themes

6.2.5. Results and Discussion – Interactions and themes

While the workshop was originally set out to investigate how the framework and the ideation cards were used and received in the process of developing games aiming for political engagement of its player base, the analysis of the workshop data revealed a lot more about the design process and whether it is influenced as originally anticipated. It seemed therefore appropriate to include aspects other than the original objectives in order to present a fuller account of elements that can influence both the use of the design tools at hand as well as the design process of developing politically engaging games in general.

When looking at influences on the design process as well as final designs, it also becomes apparent that there are two main sources of input. On the one hand, the materials and other parts of the workshops shaped each group's work. On the other, however, there were also several outside forces and elements that shaped the design exercise in ways the provided materials would not have been able. These two different factors are thus worthy of considering individually in the discussion below. This is followed by further observations made in relation to the workshops and the design materials alike.

6.2.5.1. 'Outside influences'

As already mentioned above, there is a certain level of heterogeneity between both workshops and participants alike. It can be argued that some of this stems from the diverse and at time very different prior experiences and knowledge as well as other elements particular to their individual backgrounds that participants brought to the workshops. The following paragraphs will discuss what this means for the final designs as well as the workshops in general.

In this context it is important to remember the difference between knowledge and experience. Knowledge is usually associated with things that have been gained through education and can thus be taught and passed on to others. Experience on the other hand is different from this as it is gained through lived experience rather than textbooks. It is thus impossible to pass on without losing some of its quality that is intrinsic to the lived experience of an experience and others do not have (Little, 2009).

In relation to games and game design

One big field of diverse and influential knowledge and experience among participants is the area of games and games design.

While no participants had objectively absolutely no prior experience with digital games, the level of engagement, platform and point in time this was done in varied significantly. Some participants also perceived that they had no prior experience, even though they had played games in their childhood. While the parts of the workshop prior to the design exercise tried to familiarised participants with terminology and basic concept in video games and game design, this can obviously not be compared to a long-term ongoing engagement with the matter.

As such experience and time spent playing games currently and in the past ranged from having occasionally played during childhood and adolescence,

but having no current ongoing engagement with digital games, such as participant NL in group 8,

> *"Gaming experience? I used to game when I was a teenager but I don't really do anymore. I didn't do before the PhD, so I can't blame that."*

to having played in the past and still actively playing on a daily basis (group 1, 7 and 8).

> *"I've been playing video games since I was back in Bulgaria when I was six we were playing clone consoles of like Atari systems and then when I came to the UK we got the original PlayStation and I've been playing ever since. Right now, I mostly do PC gaming and PS4."* (Participant AL, group 7)

In between these extremes several other patterns emerged. There were those who had played in the past, but now only play very occasionally due to work and family obligations – this was especially prominent in group 6,

> *"Yes, digital games, over a number of years. I currently don't do too much, occasionally. I go through phases really, of playing a bit and then not for a few years and then getting the urge. So yes, a bit of gaming experience but I'm not hard core."* (Participant AD, group 6)

as well as those who used to play PC games when younger but with age and work commitments had changed their gaming habits to fit around their life and interests, opting to play games in different formats and systems. This included playing games mostly on mobile devices

> *"Gaming experience, I've played a couple of computer games. Now I've moved onto mobile games because that's more convenient"*
> (Participant R, group 8)

as well as playing analogue games, such as board and table top games instead.

"[…]my first console was a Texas Instrument in 99, so I could say I'm a computer gamer but I don't do much anymore. I have a bigger interest in table top games and I have studied war gaming as historical work."
(Participant M, group 9)

Participants' personal background in playing video games was thus very diverse. This suggests that having a section about games and games design as part of the workshop prior to the design exercise was a useful idea, as it helped to give those participants who had not played games in a long time a quick 'refresher', but also provided a common language to all participants to discuss games and game design.

Concurrently, participants also referred to other games they knew or experienced in order to describe their ideas and communicate it to others.

"AL   Alright, could be like a platformer. You plant trees or something like that. Come on. Like Mario 64, you get to jump around, pulling out weeds, planting trees"

[…]

"M   Ehm, I don't know, because we changed the… we've changed the game since we started, haven't we? [….] I was imaging like a little old-fashioned Zelda character, running around, picking up rubbish. But now it has become…" [group 7]

As the above examples show, this commonly happened in the pattern of 'like [game] but differently in a certain way". Using existing games other group members knew, helped individuals to put their point across and made the idea easier to understand. At the same time, using existing games could also be seen as a way to produce a proof of concept and validate one's point, as it was already used in a successful existing game.

This was however not limited to basic game ideas or mechanics, but also happened when discussing the use of additional technology in a group's game design.

> *"AL   We could use like GPS to tell you where your local recycling*
> *points are and you get points for walking over and…. Like, do you*
> *remember Pokemon GO?*
> *S   Yeah"* (group 7)

The above example is a case of arguing for and including the use of a specific kind of technology based on its successful implementation in another game. It is of interest to observe, that participants do not stop to consider whether the technology would really fit into their design and discuss it, but simply accept it based on the existing game alone, giving the latter considerable influence on the overall game idea.

Games brought up in the groups during the design process were however not always positive or illustrating examples, as the discussion of the game 'Papers, please' (Pope, 2013) in Group 1 shows.

> *"A: But again, like 'Papers, please', it's more a message than a game.*
> *It's like 'oh, this is an important issue, let's make a game about it'.*
> *B: Mhhhhh.*
> *A: Just because people like games."* (group 1)

Discussing other games can thus also be seen as pointing out what to avoid – in this case making a game just for its message sake, rather than focusing on having an equally strong game-play focus. The exchange also shows that participants thought that having a proper gamer was more important for them than the perceived strength or presence of a 'message' about their chosen topic, which eventually was also realised in their game idea 'Grand Theft Vote'. This view was however not shared by all other groups, thus giving rise to the divide of 'message over game/playability/fun' vs. 'a fun/engaging game that also happens to have a message attached to it. One such game was the other game in the same workshop 'From day2day' (group 2) where one participant made the observation that their game would be like

> *"P   " Yes, I'm imaging it sort of a… really boring version of GTA."*

Putting the 'message' before the 'fun' was thus a conscious decision, even as participants were aware that this could make their game more 'boring.

This thematic was not limited to discussing game mechanics, but was also echoed in the process of finding a topic for one's game in the first place, as group 7 showed:

> "MAR   I think in terms of political ideals… I don't know, environmental stuff, or…?
>
> SIM   Nah, that's no fun
>
> ALE   Is that too boring?
>
> MAR   No? What do you want to do then?
>
> SIM   Okay, let me think…
>
> […]
>
> SIM   Mmhh….. […] I'm trying to think of hot topics for political engagement these days. In fact, a hot one that [I could] agree on is 'Fake News'
>
> MAR   Och, no!
>
> SIM   I know, it's like so boring, but it's something like…
>
> MAR   I don't want to play a game that makes me go through fake news!
>
> SIM   No, get engaged with it
>
> MAR   But that's the point of game, isn't it? To support like, engagement, like…"

This pinpoints the overall challenge of making something current interesting and entertaining at the same time. Participants seem to think that a lot of 'typical' topics, such as the environment, cannot be fun to begin with, which therefore also makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make an engaging, yet also not-boring experience for the player.

Coming back to the notion of using existing games to describe certain game elements of a group's game idea, was also not limited to the design process

but was also used when presenting game ideas to the workshop at large at the 'pitch phase'.

> *"AX   So, have you ever played some Sim City, or games like that?*
>
> *T   I played Sims only.*
>
> *AX   It should be the same part, so the idea of Sim City is that you're the mayor of that city, you're going to build it either from scratch or take a city that was already built and continue from there.*
> *You have different cities around, and you can trade with them, you can trade resources or any other things, and basically as the mayor, you run everything. So, you have the final decision of politics, economical, financial, transport, energy, water supplies, anything that you want. So, the idea of this is basically that with a different goal in the end. So, the goal of Sim City is basically build a city and try to understand how that works.*
> *The idea of this game is to protect the environment as the goal at the end. So, to try to teach to the person who is playing how the environment process, works or how sustainable processes or activities can improve the quality of the city and the population."* (workshop 2)

The above however also gives rise to the question as to what degree existing games were used purely as inspiration for certain aspects of one's own design or whether some design could be moulded too closely to already existing games. While the latter is not a bad thing per se – it is common practice among many commercially developed games – it might be seen a sign for less creativity or risk taking on the designer's side as it is very reliant on the strength of the original design.

Another way to consider outside influences on the game design process is to consider participants' knowledge and experience not just from playing games, but also what influence formal knowledge, e.g. from studying game design

and development on a higher education level, or professional experience and training in game development and design, can have.

One participant in group 1 had formal training in game design and game development. He also used this training regularly on a professional basis. One other participant, from group 7, used games as part of a project as part of previous education without being entirely focused on it. Three other participants were professionally engaged with games and/or designing interactive media and experience. All three participants ended up in the same group, number 6.

Aside from these degrees of formal training and professional experience, the remaining participants had varying knowledge of game design and development. While some had more in-depth knowledge about games and the technologies involved, other were less knowledgeable or interested in this aspect. While no participant had objectively absolutely no experience with playing games, how this translates into knowing about game design is less easy to measure, not least because of the potential gap between individually perceived and objective knowledge about game, e.g. it is one thing to know the basic options present in many games and another, to understand game design choices made by the designers. The point of perceived knowledge and use versus actual actions will be continued to be explored further in this chapter.

One way this difference in knowledge and experience is manifest in the workshop and the designs is how it can feed into and inform the design process, as witnessed during discussions in the group and affects decisions of how to link themes or issues with the overall game play.

The prime example of this can be found in group 1 which has one of the formally trained game designers and researchers among the participants.

The participant both talked about things he learned about through his work when talking about player experience

> *"Okay, so I like this idea of making the player do them, 'cause there is a lot of work on uncomfortable interactions"* (Participant A, Group 1)

and is also aware of certain trends currently going in game design, such as putting the message before the game experience, something he is critical about.

> *"A: Let me think, like a Fake News game? But I think I've already seen a couple of fake news games already. One where you are in charge of doing the propaganda for a small country? Yeah, that would….*
> *[…] But again, like 'Papers, please', it's more a message than a game. It's like 'oh, this is an important issue, let's make a game about it'. […] Just because people like games."* (Group 1)

This allows for the design process to be above the level of subjective opinions of what is better – as found in many other groups which mostly replied on their own experience of playing games and known examples, as for example found in group 7 with Pokemon Go as mentioned earlier and group 8,

> *"There is two ways. The classical way is that everyone has an empire and they are fighting each other. The other thing [inaudible] ministers and other things, your policies are kind influencing the whole […]"*
> (Participant O, Group 8)

but instead is informed as least partially by awareness of the design space and knowledge of both games design and (games) research.

Prior knowledge in general plays a prominent role, both during the group discussions previous to the design exercise as well as the game design process. The most common form of previous knowledge and experience is the participant's own experience with games, both gaming in general as well as specific game titles as for example the above quote from group 8 shows.

This kind of knowledge makes the design process easier and quicker in a variety of ways. First, prior knowledge makes understanding gaming concepts used as part of the workshop and the politics in games framework a lot easier. As such participants with more prior experience were less likely to ask for clarifications on terms or concepts, as the lack of such question in groups 1, 6 or 7 shows. Second, shared knowledge of games and gaming concept helps in effectively communicating idea between participants, even if they might not be aware of the technical terms or concepts. The above participant O might not know the exact technical terms, but due to general gaming knowledge of the group overall he can effectively communicate his point.

This usage of games could also be seen as them becoming schemas that both help in communication and design.

Similarly going back to existing games helps one to come up with ideas. Ideas that have already proven to work. Therefore, using elements or bigger parts of existing work can also been as a validation of one's own concept or design. An example of this behaviour can be found during group 7's design discussions, which included mention of games such as Pokemon Go, the Zelda and Super Mario series (see above) as well as the Duolingo App.

> *"I mean, look at like the duolingo app, which is gamified language learning. You compete with your friends for who learnt the most that week. And actually, that makes it fun…. It has been proven. I mean there are studies showing that it does motivate people to learn"*
> (Participant AL, Group 7)

Rather than focusing on one game in particular as design inspiration, the group picked elements from different games that have proven useful and worked. This final game design was a mixture of known game elements and own interpretations and ideas, laced with the group's chosen idea. The group's process was thus more design than content or theme driven.

At the same time there is also a danger on relying on previous experience too much. Initially, a participant's idea and understanding of a concept might be incorrect or incomplete. This is both true for gaming and political concepts. For example, various groups described and categorised their games as role play gaming, though some of these fitted the common understanding of this genre of games better than others. Participants' perceived knowledge versus their objective and correct knowledge can thus vary, which is something we will return to further below in the analysis.

Similarly, relying on existing game too much can also limit one's creativity. For example, instead of coming up with new designs, established game concepts are simply taken up and the issues or themes of interest for someone are 'stacked on' to it, e.g. 'Environment City' can be seen to be seen alternative version of Sim City with stronger focus on the environment. Another way this can be limiting the design process, is in taking what other games are doing as prescriptive or a check list that needs to be adhered to. One example of this is group 8, which starts off with what is possible in 'traditional games'

> *"I mean, if you want to go for like any traditional [inaudible] kind of game […] you can't necessary say Capitalism is [inaudible] you can't argue [inaudible] Building the Empire kind of game […]"* (Participant O, group 8)

While this tendency became slightly less pronounced throughout the design process, common game design elements were still preferred. It should be noted that this group did not have someone with game design experience in it, but instead several video game enthusiasts who played on a regular basis.

Some groups were more heavily influenced by existing games than others, however some reference to existing games or game ideas can be found in all groups, as above-mentioned examples show. Overall, having more different and diverse examples seems to make the resulting game more unique.

Both the groups in workshop 1 show that having the same influence or inspiration from the gaming world does not mean that the resulting game design needs to be equal. In this workshop, Grand Theft Auto was discussed as both an example for games and games elements in general as well as an example to be analysed and considered through the lens of the Politics in Games framework. Participants were thus already primed with a joint understanding of the game. This then helped to relate back to Grand Theft Auto as an example discussed as part of the design process as well as a source of design ideas, as already mentioned above. The outcomes are however fairly different, highlighting that example games might have some influence on the design process, but are not prescriptive for the outcome.

Overall, things discussed earlier in the workshops did seem to have some influence in all workshops, but were never as pronounced as in workshop 1. One reason for this among many could be the nature of the discussed games. Grand Theft Auto with its open-world setting allows for a lot of freedom and exploration, making its basic notion fairly malleable for designers to influence and put their own spin on it. The other games discussed in the other workshops, Civilisation, Age of Empires, Mario Brothers and Monopoly are – while fairly diverse between themselves and with the expectation of probably Civilization– less flexible in their matter and thus will likely only influence a certain type of game.

In relation to politics

A second field of 'prior experience' or knowledge influencing the final designs and discussion during the workshop is knowledge about politics and experience of political and activist activities.

Levels of interest and knowledge about politics between participants varied more than in regards to their gaming related experience. While for games a certain, at least implicit, shared minimum level of understanding and experience existed – all participants played or worked with games at some point in their past - this was not as much the case. Self-described interest in and knowledge about politics varied between participants. Three participants can be categorised as being 'educated' in politics due to their degree background, making them particularly familiar with formal political processes and the workings of political systems. One participant was a member of a political party in the UK and two had experience working in non-governmental organisations. Many more were part of activist, volunteer and interest groups. Others had a more personal interest in the area, that they expressed through following the news, discussing current events with friends or activities such as supporting local university strike day. One participant said this was his way to keep in touch with his home country while being abroad (Participant R from group 8), while others admitted being a bit confused by the political terms initially.

Out of the three participants that had a formal higher-education training in politics as well as the one participant working in (political) engagement promotion, two games were focusing on a specific theme or setting, recycling with group 7's 'Buried Alive' and social media with group 6, whereas the other two had a broader institutional perspective. One was from a sovereign debt problem angle in 'Debtopia', group 5, more generally addressing give and take in a government meeting personal gain in the untitled game from 8. Formal educational background itself thus does not (solely) predict the direction and theme a game can have. It is however noteworthy that both group 5 and 8 are the only designs putting the player in the position of a member of the national government. Other games only do this on a local level (Environment City), medium government level employee (Chrystal Palace) or portray the side of the politicians as the ethically questionable position (Grand Theft Vote

and World Goals). While there is no evidence that differences or similarities in groups 5 and 8 are only there because of its formally educated members, having someone capable to understand, explain and correct any political concepts and general institutional structure can certainly be an encouraging factor.

This indirectly links back to the below discussion on participants perceived knowledge contrary to the objective facts. As a practical example, the portrayal of the (authoritarian) Trump administration in 'World Goals' (group 4) may or may not be an accurate depiction of what the government in question has or will do, it is however primarily what the group members imagined what would happen instead of pure facts. While being instrumental in many games to keep a theme interesting and entertaining, there is always the danger of players getting the wrong image or starting to believe the depiction to be close to reality. This phenomena is not limited to games, as it has been found and investigated in regards to other media outlets such as television dramas (Capelos & Graber, 2009; Richardson & Corner, 2012; van Zoonen, 2007a).

Moreover, personal interests and things encouraged during formal (not political science related) education also proved to be influential for group 8's game. One participant having studied (dystopian) literature as part of their degree and mentioning it as a personal field of interest, this directly informed the overall setting and out look of the game the group designed. Similarly, one participant in group 7 previously studied behaviour change in-depth as part of their degree. This was brought up during the design process for 'Buried Alive', however his opinion was not left completely unquestioned and the participant was happy to go with any ideas the other group members would put forward.

> *"M   What was your background again? What are you doing now?*
>
> *AL   Political Science PhD.*
>
> *M   Okay.*

> AL   But I am open towards any political idea you want to put
> across. What story do you want to tell, I'm okay with it." (Group 7)

This illustrates that pure expert knowledge itself does not always seem to be the dominant factor when deciding on a design or theme as part of a group.

One of the participants in Group 2/'From day2day' volunteers in an access to justice campaign, which aims to make young people, often from less well-off backgrounds, more familiar with their rights, especially when involved in 'stop and search' by the politics or similar situations, as mentioned during the design exercise.

> "It's a thing from law. It's basically the idea of sort of people who are less advantaged that can't afford legal. […] So, it's sort of the idea of legal aid that sort of thing. And, you go ahead and help them out with legal issues that they wouldn't otherwise have, but within the actual law school in the society that I work in. Obviously, you can't really give advice because we're not qualified lawyers but what we can do is help out in the community with getting sort of usually young people to engage with the law and understand issues. But yes, so what I was doing was looking at technology and mainly looking at that which would I think it ties in quite nicely.
>
> Generally, young people wouldn't engage with politics because it's got that oh it seems like oh it's a bit boring. It may not affect me and that sort of thing. What I was doing was looking at okay, let's say you get stopped and searched on the street. You get taken to the police station. There's all these rules around that that you might not know and that you might have misconceptions about. So, there's a way of this app. The idea of this app was to put things in simple terms, so they would understand it rather than a big long piece of statute. Make it look appealing and engage people like that." (Participant N, group 2)

As a result of this work, the issue of different chances and treatment between different socio-economic and ethnic groups is particularly prominent for him and features heavily in the game and basic idea being 'From day2day'. The game is thus an example how activist issues of an individual can be turned into a game. Considering that this was not the case for all other participants – some who chose a different topic rather than their main interest as part of group consensus or for other reasons – one should wonder why this is the case here. When looking at the group dynamics of the design process, it becomes clear that the other group members were interested in his work and as such chose to go with his topic instead of pushing their own agenda.

One way this difference of politics as opposed to gaming experience was expressed in the design process was that most designs featured a lot more Method ideation cards compared to Area cards (see table 7' below in the materials sections). Methods describe the (political) actions and abilities that can be found in a game, whereas Area is closer to specialised political knowledge and different Area need more consideration to be combined successfully and realistically. For designers with more gaming than politics experience, one could hypothesise, it is easier to add and understand what can be done in a game or space rather than link different complex areas together. Alternatively, 'games' and abilities in games could also seem more diverse for someone with limited awareness of the broad range politics can encapsulate. A more detailed discussion of card use will follow in the next section.

Another contributing factor to the difference between prior experience and (formal) knowledge of politics influencing the design process among participants, more so than for games, could be found in the fact that politics in itself is less a universal experience than games can be. Apart from certain elements of localisation and translating, most games are the dame whether

they are played in the US, Europe or Asia. Politics on the other hand, while there are ways to systemise them, tend to be more specific and influenced by local geography, history and culture. Participants came from 11 different countries (see table 31), each of them having their own political and governance system. Apart from certain basic values and concepts such as 'democracy' and 'parliament', their individual experience and understanding of what 'politics' means and how its functions is thus different to begin with.

It could thus be hypothesized that discussing politics should therefore require participants to first attain a joint understanding of what 'politics' means for them within the realms of their design. Looking at the different groups, this rings true for some, but is by far a universal observation as different groups have different ways to overcome this situation. In addition, previous group discussions about politics and what participants associate with it might also have helped to create a level playing field and understanding.

One effect the homogeneity in nationalities between participants had was that the problems which were addressed, and real-life examples used as inspirations were diverse.

As such, themes and issues featured in the games were both likely to be influenced by a participant's background. A good example of this can be found in the game 'Debtopia' (group 5).

> *"My game is actually going to be a solution to… not a solution, what happens in Greece, but in a game. Obviously, it's not going to be located in Greece, but yeah..."*

'Debtopia', is about a country struggling with sovereign debt and the impact this has on a country. The player takes on the role of various members of the country's government. The overall goal is to overcome the debt situation and other problems linked to it. The participant designing the game was from Greece themselves and as such had experienced the Greek debt crisis first

hand. This experience thus influenced the game design, especially its theme, issues featured and overall setting.

It is interesting to note the game was almost seen as a 'solution' to the situation in Greece. This makes the complex real-life situation appear to be a puzzle with a definite 'correct' state. What this entails was however not further discussed by the participant. While this was obviously only an exercise for a general game idea, this thematic also shows how difficult it can be to model a general existing problem into a game world, without oversimplifying it and thus making finding a solution in real-life look easier than it actually is.

The influence of one's national background on the game design does however not always have to be so obvious as in the example above. 'Environment City' (group 3) is a case where experience of one's home country and the issues faced there, influence the game's topic in a more subtle way, without being openly stated as such.

> *"It will be something in that sense, but with the climate change. So, increasing temperatures, decrease rivers, or increase the water of the rivers, tornadoes around the world, more rain, those types of things that affects the cities, truthfully, and not aliens.*

> *And the idea here is also that you need to have one of the interesting parts would be, most of the time, the people who suffer from these things are the people itself that live in difficult regions.*

> *The politicians also normally don't see those actions of being sustainable are more important than economical issues. So, this would be a duality between protests that people can do, or campaigns that people will be doing to improve the sustainability of that city, or the environment issues, or plant more trees around the city, or improve rivers and so on, with how politics from those cities, focusing more on the economical parts.*

> *So, you as a mayor have to decide which way you're going to do it. Either you're going to focus on the economical part, and you see the*

environment of the city have been destroyed, or you're going to focus on that one, and have to find different economical ways to deal with those parts. So that's…"

The game's main themes are such environmental problems and sustainability vs economic growth and how climate change is often more experienced by those more vulnerable and living in less developed countries (United Nations, 2016). The participant designing this game was from Brazil and moved to the UK for his postgraduate education. As such he is more aware of the opposing power of economic growth vs environmental preservation, as for example visible in the deforestation of the Amazonian rainforest, as well as the Western (European) perception of this being a problem far away from their own doorstep. One of the goals of the designer is thus to also raise awareness of these problems and their consequences.

One's nationality and national politics are however not limited to influential themes featured in the games designed. This was the case in 'Grant Theft Vote' where one participant's idea of election rigging in Mexico not only was the starting point for the game overall, but it eventually also emerged as a game mechanism in the design itself.

> *"B: I was just thinking about all the horrible things that happen in Mexico. You know when…. Our country has a history of rigged elections. […] So there have been cases of… the police going in and stealing the, ehm…*
> *A: ballot box? Okay, wow.*
> *B: And taking them away and people are like going after them. There is also this strategy they using a lot, when they are going to poor villages, like very marginalised villages, they go there and they entice people to vote for them, in exchange for something ridiculously mundane.*
> *A: Clean water?*
> *B: No, something even worse than that. It's like I'm giving you this package and it has like a meal, water, a t-shirt […]*

A: Like a promotional thing? Here is a free t-shirt for a vote type thing, or?

B: And not only that, but also food.

A: So not just a promotional item, but a little care package?

B: Yeah, something like that.

A: Care package for a vote, basically. [...]

B: Yeah, that's horrible and... yeah, like...making the system . For instance, this year it's gonna be like with an app. They are using a mobile app.

A: You're voting through an app?

B: It's going to be another channel for voting. But I'm assuming there is going to be a lot of hacking involved.

A: Suddenly, so many new phones appear...

B: Yeah

A: Oh, well whatever. There must be some kind of identification method. It's not per phone, it's per registered user, I assume?

B: Yes, but what I am trying to say is that there's different strategies to rig elections. So in this case, you'd be the guy that is doing these bad jobs."

And later, this also informed the further game design

"A: Yeah [...] You're the Spin, the Fixer, the whatever.... Game goals....

B: So it's like go and do missions.... Win as much territory...

A: Yeah, votes and territory [writing] [...] Should be districts, I guess, like in the US [...] Main challenges: question?

B: losing your territory I guess?

A: So actually, a good question, there are other parties, right?

B: Yeah

A: okay, so.... Other parties, and you can - so you're not only applying these methods to your..., electorate,... So use of force, sabotage, stealing ballot boxes.... So other parties, the electorate....

B: Doing this..... I guess people, ordinary people [...], the NPCs [....]

would be against whatever you do

A: (Meaning they have) Common sense [laughter] [...] Some sort of...."

Thus, events and practices in real life become tools and methods the player can apply in-game and real life opposition and members of the civil society become the antagonists.

Contrary to 'Debtopia', participants purposefully decided to change the setting of the game from the 'typical' country associated with these problems to a more generic Western state, which is usually considered 'safe' from these things.

> *"A: Alright, okay. So.... Okay, hold on where is that thing where we put our lead? [short noise of paper moving about] I think we have a setting, we have national elections, okay? Is the game world.... Shall we go fictional country?*
>
> *B: Yeah! I think that makes it more... I guess politically correct.*
>
> *A: Right, 'cause.... Maybe put it in a... just to be... well, I'm not sure about provocative, because it's not provocative anymore. But, general, nameless Western country,*
>
> *B: Yeah.*
>
> *A: Not Mediterranean thingy, not South America, so you know, this could happen in your 'comfortable enlightened West'.... Because it does. [laughter]"*

The choice of setting the game in Western country is thus seen as an act of provocation and making players aware that problems like these can occur everywhere. In this regard, Grand Theft Auto is similar to Environment City, as both try to bring themes and issue into the Western context that are more often considered to be problems in other countries.

Based on the cases at hand, it appears that non-UK nationalities and backgrounds were more likely to influence the game characteristics than

being a UK citizen. These 'problems and topics from back home' are however quite diverse as seen – ranging from environmental problems to more structural problems such as vote fraud and economical sustainability. These are also not always framed as such, as the example of Group 1 shows. The participant is from Brazil, a country where the deforestation of the tropical rainforest is an ongoing issue, and generally features a lot of the 'economic growth vs environmental sustainability' problems that are also present in the game. At the same time, it also needs to be considered in how far personal background rather than just one's nationality features here. The participant in Group 5 has a background in international relations and thus potentially a better understanding of the political and international aspects of the problem presented in her game, talking about sovereign debts such as experienced in Greece. Both Group 1 and Group 3 participants do however not have such a background. In these cases is seems that nationality can be more influential than educational background when deciding on an issue to discuss.

Coming back to the notion of variety of political experience, and with these opinions, among participants, it would also be worth mentioning how differences in these were expressed during the design process and eventually overcome.

One way any differences were voiced and worked through, was through debate and political arguments in the group. This was the case for group 7, in which differences between participant in regards to different elements of environmental protection surfaced. The two participants did know each other previously and mentioned that this was part of a larger ongoing debate and behaviour between the two of them.

> "M   Environment! Why not the environment?
>
> S   [to ??] with the environment - the environment is fine!
>
> AL   Save it!
>
> M   Save it!

S	Save it from whom?
M	Oh, here we go, here we go….
AL	Do you know each other? Cause you're….
M	Yeah
S	Yeah, we argue everyday
AL	You look like old friends I was gonna say
M	Yeah, sorry!"

The group overcame this position by agreeing to focus their game on a different aspect of environmental protection. Instead of talking about the pollution of the sea, they opted to promote recycling as an everyday activity which was not as contested a problem for participants. Conflict mitigation in this group was thus also a factor influencing the theme and game design. Interestingly enough, no other group showcased such obvious political and other disagreements. This could be influenced by the fact that other groups did not feature previous relationships of this kind. Putting a group of relative strangers together seems to be beneficial for group 'peace' as it is harder to judge the other person.

Other groups decided to overcome any gaps in understanding and experiencing politics both in the group for individual players by keeping the theme or context of the game as universal and generalised as possible.

Two groups that chose to include a more universal and relatable topic were groups 6 and 7. Group 6's game about social capital and lies on social media is on the one hand more a universal setting due to the fact that the internet makes it available in many parts of the world, as well as it is something many different people encounter on a regular basis, making the game overall more relatable. Group 7's take on environmental protection through increased recycling is another fairly general topic as recycling is a wide-spread practice in many countries, though it can take different forms. Environmental protection is additionally a popular term, thus again appealing to what people

perceive as good or necessary though their game. However due to being dependent on the participant's location and the potential availability of data on recycling regulations and locations from councils, the practical usability and appeal of the game in its presented form is limited. Design decisions could thus also lead to the exclusion of potential players abroad in order to focus on and promote local problems. Groups 3 and 8 both overcame this problem by creating an as universal setting as possible, not even specifying whether it was set in a Western country or not, instead it is simply a parliamentary democracy (group 8) or an unspecified city (group 3). The motivations for this were similar, it is on the one hand educational for more participants while also highlighting problems usually associated with non-Western countries to a Western audience.

> *"And the idea here is also that you need to have one of the interesting parts would be, most of the time, the people who suffer from these things are the people itself that live in difficult regions.*
> *The politicians also normally don't see those actions of being sustainable is something more important than economical issues. So, this would be a duality between protests that people can do, or campaigns that people will be doing to improve the sustainability of that city, or the environment issues, or plant more trees around the city, or improve rivers and so on, with how politics from those cities, focusing more on the economical parts."* (Participant A, Group 3)

The groups' proposed goal and issues were thus great influences on the overall game and trumped other considerations in the process.

Other groups decided to forgo the creation of a joint understanding or a universal setting in favour of focusing on one participant's specific political experience and knowledge. This is the case for groups 1, 3 (mentioned above) and 5.

In group 1 participants agreed that one group member's experience with rigged elections was particularly strong and interesting enough as a topic to exclusively focus on it. The group however decided to put the examples given by said participant into a different (setting) context, a Western democracy rather than Mexico, in order to 'drive the message home',

> *"A: Right, 'cause…. Maybe put it in a… just to be… well, I'm not sure about provocative, because it's not provocative anymore. But, general, nameless Western country,*
> *B: Yeah.*
> *A: Not Mediterranean thingy, not South America, so you know, this could happen in your 'comfortable enlightened West'…. Because it does."* (Group 1)

while also adding additional methods to the overall theme that were inspired by existing games such as Grand Theft Auto,

> *"So would it be like missions, like Grand Theft Auto? Or would that be too complicated? I mean …[cough] game, but…"* (Participant B, Group 1)

moulding the game's setting both into something recognisable and factual as their intent to include real life cases of election rigging shows, while also keeping a satire and entertainment aspect to it.

This was the opposite approach from group 5, which decided to directly take their own experience of the economic and sovereign debt crisis of Greece in the early 2010s and put it into a context that is similar to Greece, but called by a different name.

> *"My game is actually going to be a solution to… not a solution, what happens in Greece, but in a game. Obviously, it's not going to be located in Greece, but yeah…"* (Participant T, Group 5)

This might have stemmed from their emotional attachment to the experience, seeing how one of the game's overall goals is to create empathy and

understanding for people in such situations, a thing many Greeks felt was missing from the 'European solidarity' and treatment by other nations/nationalities during those years (Ervasti et al., 2019; Muro & Vidal, 2016; Sambanis et al., 2018).

One final approach to both bridge participants' and players' different political understanding and experience was to set the game in an entirely fantastic, futuristic world, similar yet different from our world as group 9 showed. 'Man with no Name'/'The Chrystal Dome' is set in an dystopian authoritarian state, unrelated to any existing countries of today. Here the 'rules of politics' can be decided on and invented by the group as they seem fit to suit their goals or rather in this case, fit the narrative of the game, without knowing in-depth concepts other than the basic premise of dystopian societies.

There is evidence that individual interests and experience of a single group member, both political and personal, influenced the design process and choice of theme. Given the above-mentioned diversity in nationalities during the workshops these influences were equally diverse.

Participant bought issues they faced in their home countries in to the design process. This was the case in groups 1, 3 and 5. Group 1's Grand Theft Vote design process was started with one participant mentioning vote rigging followed by various examples of events and habits common in Mexico. Environment City one the other side was informed by the participant's impression of the continues loss of Brazil's rainforest and how climate change was often seen as a problem that was far away by many Western nations. Finally, Debtopia's background and setting were taken from the real-life situation of Greece during the height of the financial crisis, which the participant had lived through, as discussed above. Nationality was thus a common influence in the design process.

Moreover, personal interest and things encouraged during formal (not political science related) education also proved to be influential for group 8's game. One participant having studied (dystopian) literature as part of their degree and mentioning it as a personal field of interest, this directly informed the overall setting and lookout of the game the group designed. Similarly, one participant in group 7 previously studied behaviour change in-depth as part of their degree. This was brought up during the design process for 'Buried Alive', however his opinion was not left completely unquestioned and added to the ongoing conflict and debate in this group.

> *"M   I don't think you should redeem them for anything, it should be just about getting on top of the score board […]*
>
> *AL   If you look at like studies about motivation, if you get things that are monetary rewarded, people are not really engaged*
>
> *SIM   They have short-term motivation. Monetary rewards actually have that effect, but only short-term.*
>
> *M   I'm more interested in being the best than being…*
>
> *AL   But you want to change people's mind politically, long-term….*
>
> *SIM   That takes time. With behaviour change usually you need time.*
>
> *AL   That's why you hook them with the score boards*
>
> *SIM   (…) by political design, but it needs to be by design, like when you have the 'nudges', like when you change the opt-in/opt-out system. This is by design. They are forcing people to actually change their minds, because you don't offer them choice, you offer them the default choice."* (Group 7)

'Inside influences' includes all those elements that influenced the design process that came as part of the workshop. These include materials provided during the design exercise, game design elements groups had decided on and group discussions during the workshop.

Materials

As described above when discussing the set-up of the workshop, participants were provided with a diverse set of tools and materials to help and guide them in the development of their game idea. Due to the overall goal of the workshop; observing the use of the framework – and also the ideation cards based on the framework – being used in creative and generative settings, the overall focus of this section will be on the card set and anything else linked to the framework.

Ideation Cards and their use

Numbers of attendees and groups were not the only things different between workshops. Looking at the end products of the workshops – each group's game design – certain differences and trends are visible not only between groups, but also between workshops. One way this can be observed is through the cards and other materials used (see figure 56 for a detailed overview).

Firstly, there is the difference in number of cards chosen for each design as part of the group's design and poster (see table 34). The two groups in workshop 1 used 20 (group 1) and 19 (g2) cards each, adding up to 19.5 cards in average. Workshop 2's groups used 18 (g3), 22 (g4) and 13 (g5) each, coming to an average of 17.6. Finally, in workshop 3 group 6 associated 8 cards with their design, group 7 used 6 cards, group 8 only 2 cards and group

9 picked 4 ideation cards for their game design. The average in this workshop was thus 5 cards per design. The total of ideation cards used in workshop 1 was 39, in workshop 2 it was 53 and in workshop 3 it was only 20. There is thus a notable difference in number of cards used between the first two workshops and workshops 3, in which groups used two thirds less cards than was used by groups in the other workshops in average. Overall, 112 cards per used over the nine different designed, which equates to an average 12.4 ideation cards per design.

If comparing cards types, there is also a difference between groups and workshops.

On average among all the designs (see table 36), participants used 3 Engagement cards, 3.3. Area cards, 3.6 Methods cards and 2.4 cards, making Methods the most used card category. This image changes when comparing individual workshops with one another. While workshop 1 did indeed use Methods most often, 9 cards in average, this was not the case for workshop 2 and 3, which used 5.3 and 0.75 in average. In workshop 2, Area cards were used most often with an average of 5.6, whereas workshop 1 used 6 and workshop 3 used 1.5. During workshop 3, Goals cards were the card types used most often with 1.75 cards in average. In workshop 1 5 Goals cards were used in average and 2.6 in workshop 2. Engagement cards were used to varying degrees. Workshop 1 used 5.5 in average, whereas workshop 2 used 4 and workshop 3 had an average of 1.

The overall card set had 7 Engagement, 12 Area, 9 Methods and 8 Goals cards in it. As such it is of note that Area, even though it had potentially the most cards used, it was only the most used card type in one workshop, workshop 2. Similarly, Engagement has the least cards in the deck, but is the third most used type in total. This suggests that just because there are more cards to choose from, a card set category does not automatically become more frequently used. Instead it seems that the way something can be done and is addressed through individual Methods is more important than touching on as

many subject areas as possible for participants based on the way the cards
are used.

Card name	Type	Used by	w1g1	w1g2	w2g3	w2g4	w2g5	w3g6	w3g7	w3g8	w3g9	TOTAL	Note
Form Insitutional	Engagement		1	1	1							3	
Form Informal	Engagement		1	1	1	1	1					5	
Agency	Engagement		1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	8	
Knowledge Implicit	Engagement		1	1	1	1						4	
Knowledge Factual	Engagement		1		1	x						2	
Knowledge Values	Engagement		1	1	1	1			1			5	
Blank Card (Engagement)	Engagement											0	
Social Issues	Area		1	1		1	1	1				5	
Level of Politics Personal	Area			1		1			1			3	
Level of Politics Local	Area			1		1						2	
Level of Politics National	Area		1			1	1					3	
Level of Politics International	Area				1	1						2	
Economics	Area				1	1						2	
Justice	Area		1	1		1		1			1	5	turned on its head
Transport	Area				1							1	
Trade	Area				1		1	1				3	
Environment	Area				1	1	1		1			4	
Military and Defence	Area											0	
Blank Card (Area)	Area											0	
Bribery	Method		1	1		1	1					4	
Campaigning	Method		1	1	1	1		1	1			6	
Use of Force	Method		1	1		1					1	4	
Negotiations	Method		1	1	1	1	1					5	
Espionage	Method		1			1						2	
Policy and Law Making	Method		1	1	1	1	1					5	
Protest	Method						1					1	
Spending and distributive power	Method		1	1	1	1						4	
Blank Card (Method)	Method		1				1					2	Bullshittin Referendu
Progress	Goals		1	1	1	1	1	1				6	
Be the First of Best	Goals		1					1	1			3	
World Domination	Goals		1			1						2	
Simulation	Goals			1		1				1	1	4	
Survival	Goals			1	1			1		1		4	
Blank Card (Goals)	Goals			1								1	Role Playing Game
Resource accquisition and growth	Goals				1							1	
Puzzle solving	Goals						1					1	
Sub-Total			**20**	**19**	**18**	**22**	**13**	**8**	**6**	**2**	**4**	**112**	
Other materials													
Cards in general			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	
Cards on poster			1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	8	
Design cues			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	
Framework			?	?	?	?	1	?	1	?	?	2	
Framework on poster							1		1			2	
Genre overview												0	
Political concepts overview												0	
Additional notes (on poster)			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	
Additional notes (on separate paper)					1	1					1	3	
Examples/additions to cards on poster			1	1	1	1	1			1		6	
Own Knowledge/exp (discussed)													
... about games			1	1 ?		1 ?		1	1	1	1	7	
... about game design (edu/professional)			1					1 ?				2	
... about politics (personal interest)			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		8	
... about politics (educated)							1		1	1		3	
... topic discussed			1				1		1		1	4	
Influence of previous discussions			1	1					1			3	w1 gta, un
Sub-Total			**10**	**8**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**8**	**10**	**8**	**7**	**75**	
Genres and game types													
Role Play Game			?	1		1	1		?		1	4	
Puzzles				1								1	
Narrative (driven)											1	1	
Simulation			?	1	1 ?	?				1		3	
Strategy					?	?		1		1		2	
Survival				1								1	
(open world) sand box			1	1	?							2	
Location based (app)									1			1	
Card or board game like										1		1	
(FP) Shooter												0	
Platformer/Jum-and-Run												0	
Adventure												0	
Action												0	
Sports												0	
Horror												0	
Sub-Total			**1**	**5**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**2**	**2**	**14**	

Figure 56 Individual card use between groups

Every group used at least one card of each type, apart from group 8 which only used Goal cards (see table 35). Group 1 used Methods most often with 8 cards. This was also the case for group 2 with 6 cards and group 5 with 5 cards. Group 3 was the only one using Engagement cards as the most often used card type. Similarly, area cards were the most numerous set used by group 4 only. Goals were the most commonly card type by group 8. Finally, three groups had at least two types of cards as most commonly set. For group 6 these were Area and Goals, for group 7 this was Engagement and Area, while group 9 used equal numbers of all sets with one each.

Card usage between workshops and group is thus far from homogenous, which in itself is an expression of the differences between in design approaches and even more so participants' goals as expressed through the ideation cards.

Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Overall
Total Cards	20	19	18	23	13	8	6	2	4	112
Average for this workshop		19.5			17.6				5	12.4

Table 34 Card numbers used per design and average per workshop

Card Type	g1	g2	g3	g4	g5	g6	g7	g8	g9	Total
Engagement	6	5	6	4	2	1	2	0	1	27
Area	3	4	5	8	4	3	2	0	1	30
Methods	8	6	4	7	5	1	1	0	1	33
Goals	3	4	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	22

Table 35 Cards Types used per Group

Card Type	Average Total	Average Workshop 1	Average Workshop 2	Average Workshop 3	Total Workshop 1	Total Workshop 2	Total Workshop 3	Individual cards of type in deck
Engagement	3	5.5	4	1	11	12	4	7
Area	3.3	6	5.6	1.5	12	17	6	12
Methods	3.6	9	5.3	0.75	18	16	3	9
Goals	2.4	5	2.6	1.75	10	8	7	8

Table 36 Average number of card type used in total and per workshop vis-à-vis number of card type in deck

These differences in card usage also tell us something about the games they were used in and what the intensions and perspectives of their creators were.

Among other things, the designs in workshop 1 and 2 use a lot more Engagement and Area cards than workshop 3. Thus, this can be seen as the former's designs feature more forms of political engagement promoting cards or they do so in a thematically speaking broader way by featuring elements of different forms politics (informal or institutional). Player agency over the political process is in one form or another also a source of offering political knowledge as part of the game. 'Grand Theft Vote' (group 1) for example depicts both formal and informal politics, while providing players with different layers of knowledge, implicit through the depiction of actions and people in the game, factual by providing details on real-life cases of election rigging as well as on a value basis with the pronounced goal of making the player question their behaviour and feel about it, as pointed out on the group's poster. Workshop 3's designs on the other hand only feature one Engagement related card per game in average. In three out of four cases (group 6,7, and 9) this is agency and only one group, number 7, is featuring any element of political knowledge in the game, in this case with the focus on values. While there are many potential reasons for this on a group-specific level, it could be assumed that either pure engagement might not have been the main focus of these designs or that the designers found it more appropriate to focus on one particular kind they found most appropriate. The same is true for Area and Engagement. Comparing workshop 1 and 2 games with those of workshop 3, the latter's seem more focused or narrow in its subject and how this is explored, especially for group 6 with its criticism toward social media, group 7 with wanting people to recycle more or group 8 with its focus on particular government official's perspectives. The fact that Goals ideation cards were the most frequently used in workshop 3 games further strengthens the tendency for workshop 3 to be most focused as they have a smaller subject to discuss, which is associated with a small number of game end goals. While being overall fewer than in other workshops, workshop 1 and 2 have each an average of 5 and 2.6 Goals vis-à-vis number 3's 1.75, Goals are more numerous than other cards due to the relative focus of the designs. Most games in workshop 1 or 2 on the other hand feature a

broader spectrum of themes or perspectives on one main theme and how these are explored and interacted with, which again is visible by the high number of Methods cards used, 7.15 in average between the two workshops. "Day2day" for example does this through each choice of player character being associated with a specific difficulty level leading to different game experiences based on real-life everyday experience.

Finally, the number of participants in the workshop and in individual groups can also influence the design and the workshop overall.

In workshop 3, it is group 6 that seems most different from the others. This among others because of its slightly higher use of cards, 8 in total as opposed to an average of 4 among the other three groups, including the highest amount of Goals and Area cards, 3 in-total each. Unfortunately the group was not able to completely finish its design in-time due to changing the design and topic completely through the design process. It might thus be that the group would have used even more cards if time had allowed. The group members' backgrounds are also different from the rest, as it both contained individual with a (game) design background, as well as someone who worked in engagement through games themselves. There was thus more potential knowledge about the general game design process than in other groups, which did not have such members.

Workshop 3 also had the largest number of participants with a total of 11. Given participants diverse backgrounds and experience, this group was particularly heterogenous. Some participants had a formal and professional background in (game) design or political science, whereas others played for fun either in the present or in the past, with diverse non-political occupations and subjects stretching from psychology to engineering and pharmacy. As a result, group discussions during the workshop before the main design phase began tended to focus on the well-known and very general examples and points which allowed more participants to join. As such topics discussed were

the Mario games, Monopoly and Brexit. This was quite different to especially workshop 2 which was the smallest of all the workshops with only three participants, talking about more specific and expert topics. These discussions included strategy PC games such as Civilization and Age of Empires, but also discussions about the political situations in both Brazil and Romania, which were a lot more personal in nature given how two participants both came originally from these countries.

Use of cards vs. other materials

When talking about the design process and which things influenced it, it seems appropriate to also consider which of the provided materials were used most and how these influenced the design process.

Judging by group posters, observations during the workshop, the audio transcriptions and participant feedback, the Politics in Games ideation card set appears to be one of the most frequently used of all the materials provided. They were furthermore universally considered to be helpful for both aiding the design as well as providing clarification of other concepts related to the Politics in Games framework, as participant feedback, discussed further below, shows.

It is of interest to see that based on transcripts and output posters, the cards were more often considered than the overarching framework, even though they include very similar ideas. However, when looking at participants' end of workshop feedback, they all mentioned it as a useful tool. This discrepancy between participant perception and reality will be discussed in more detail below. Overall however, it seems that the framework was seen as a tool to check and validate one's design against, whereas the cards were more used to come up with- and add ideas and elements to the game.

While the cards were used on all group posters, only two incorporated the framework on it, as visible on group 5 and 7's posters. Interestingly enough, these two groups were also two out of three with a member having a theoretical degree background in politics and international relations. This feeds back into the above discussion about personal and professional backgrounds, especially with regards to politics, and further supports this through the varying use of materials.

When considering the use of basic materials such as pens, sticky notes and paper provided, different methods and ways these were used in the design process can be found as follows:

In general, most groups preferred to write on the poster with pen, adding ideation cards to the written word. Again, most groups preferred to write in one colour on the whole poster, while others used several colours to highlight phrases and concepts. Similarly, others used post-it's that were tacked on the poster. These were either also used to highlight central concepts (group 4) or added additional information and examples (group 5). Only two groups, number 7 and 8, chose to also doodle on their posters. While group 7 decided to present a draft of their game UI, group 8 used their drawing skills to general elements of the game such as cards and the overall game flow.

The documentation, if done, of each group's design process was done in different ways. All of these were in writing, but through different materials and channels. While group 9 preferred to put down their initial thoughts and idea on a separate sheet of poster paper, groups 6, 7 and 8 all preferred to put down any notes directly on the poster they would use to present their game later in the workshop. Especially for groups 6 and 8 this meant that the poster would influence thoughts that did not make it into the final game design. Group 9 (see figure 57) on the other hand preferred to build up the game on their separate poster and then transfer their plan onto the actual

poster. Even more structured than this, group 3 would go through the provided design-cue document and answer all the questions within, before transferring these and designing the actual poster. Not all groups were as structured. Group 4 ended up re-doing its entire poster to changes the design after some time into the design process. In only two groups, both from workshop 1, no notes on the design and thought process were taken.

Figure 57 Group 9's design notes

Groups also used the presented design cues and related questions in different ways through the design of their games. Some answered these directly. Group 3, as mentioned above, went systematically through them, including not only the initial cues, but also working through the more advanced options, answered these by writing into the document and then transferred their answered onto the poster. Group 7 went through initial questions and wrote questions as well as their answers on the poster itself. Group 5 went through them and then the framework, finally writing down answers and notes on post-its that were put on the poster. More commonly using these three approaches however, groups would go through the cues, some, like group 8, as quoted above and observed during the workshop, more

systematically than others and would discuss the questions within the group until a decision of how to implement something was made. Other groups, such as group 1 and 2 as well as group 4, used the design cues more as guidelines to start their game design from. In general, groups tended to stick to the initial questions and did not bother to consider the more advanced ones on the back of the design cue document as seen by the lack of many of the game elements discussed in the presented final game designs.

Overall, groups decided to use the materials as provided rather than come up with their solutions. As such the basic shape of the poster, an A1 sheet of paper, was not altered apart from added post-it's going beyond the paper's edges in group 4 and group 7's efforts to

> *"Let's get our arts and crafts on! Let's channel the childhood!"*
> (Participant AL, group 7)

when cutting and pasting the framework onto the poster. One reason for this lack in shape diversity is likely the lack of time to design the game and produce the poster alongside with it as mentioned on the feedback forms.

Genre and Game type or format decisions and their overall influence on the design process and materials

As already touched on when discussing how the focus of a game, whether it is broader or more narrowly dealing with one situation or theme, influences the amount of cards used. It is however not only the focus of a game, but its overall genre and specific characteristics, as included on the design cues participants received, that shape both card usage and overall design choices.

One example of this is group 1's game 'Grand Theft Vote', a design that in many regards can be considered an open world sandbox (Muncy, 2015). The player moves around different constituencies and tries to influence the electorate in each of them in favour of the candidate s/he is working for.

> *"You actually got to drive and do the beating, yeah okay. You're basically… is like, in Grand Theft Auto, you're a petty criminal or whatever in the world, in this case you're an employee of, you're an… what do you call? A campaign…?"* (Participant A, Group 1)

This can be done in a variety of ways and through different missions. An expression of this diversity of influencing the public can be found in the vast number of methods cards employed, 8 from a total of 9 cards in the overall deck

Group 2's 'from day2day' is similar in this regard, but has a different perspective as its similarly set in an open-ish world, but shows the politics of everyday life and how background and social economic status influence it.

> *"If you have your, I think we talked about GTA as a world almost. And, you're the first person and you go and walk out to get a job or go and sit in a job interview and things like this and then have the different parameters"* (Participant P, Group 2)

Therefore, while it still uses a lot of Method cards, 6 out of 9, it does not influence methods that are more aligned with institutional politics and its greater resources such as 'espionage'. This difference in perspective is also visible in the Goals cards employed. While 'Grand Theft Vote' wants the player to 'progress', 'be the best' and 'dominate' the game world, 'from day2day' is, whilst also considering the overall process, more interested in the player character's survival and being a good simulation and role play of situations as they occur in real life. Games with similar basic notions – an open world – and shared inspirations, both mentioned Grand Theft Auto during the design process as seen above and can thus have shared basic notions, a particularly high number of methods cards, but the exact setting and details of the game world and the player characters define and limit the exact extent to which cards feature and which not.

Similarly, a combination of certain cards can also pinpoint a certain type or genre. This can be observed with group 3's 'Environment City', which is essentially a city management and building simulation in the tradition of Sim City, which the group mentions at the beginning of their design presentation

> *"The idea of Sim City is that you're the mayor of that city, you're going to build it either from scratch or take a city that was already built and continue from there. You have different cities around, and you can trade with them, you can trade resources or any other things, and basically as the mayor, you run everything. So, you have the final decision of politics, economical, financial, transport, energy, water supplies, anything that you want. So, the idea of this is basically that with a different goal in the end." (Participant C, Group 3)*

What makes this design's card usage special is its unique pattern compared with other games in the workshops. The design uses several distinctive Area cards - economics, transport, trade and environment – combined with Methods cards such as spending and distributive power, law and policy making and progress, survival, resource acquisition and growth as goals. Environment City is the only city building focused game among all designs, and as such it can be suggested that the above combination of cards mark what a traditional economic (city) simulation is made up. Future designs involving heavy economic simulation aspects would thus be likely to have the same or very similar card usage and could be identified as such based on its card usage alone.

Looking at differences and similarities of games from individual workshops, certain trends can be observed in regards to what kind of games were produced. Workshop 1, as already discussed above, featured open-world games, though the world was shown and perceived from very different perspectives and for opposing ends. While Workshop 2 games do not share their main game mechanic like, there is still some commonality.

All the games of the workshop depict politics in an institutional frame. 'Environment City' features local politics, while 'World Goals' and 'Debtopia' both focus on national governments. Group 4 additionally includes informal elements. They furthermore feature relative diverse issues that are made up of several sub-issues and as such many different Areas. In terms of card usage this is expressed in a fairly even use of Area to Methods cards. Group 3 used 5 Area cards and 4 Methods, group 4 8 Area cards and Methods, while group 5 uses 4 Area cards and 5 Methods cards, plus a variety of Engagement cards and several Goals. While thus their themes might be quite different, environment and sustainability (Environment City) vs. grass-roots activists working against authoritarian governments (World Goals) vs. saving a country from sovereign debt and its consequences (Debtopia), their basic design set-up in regard to the ratio of cards used are fairly similar. This suggests that there is a general design pattern for games encompassing complex political situations that stretch out over several levels of politics. Finally, there is workshop 3 which, as discussed above, does have few shared characteristics between games other than the spare use of cards and a tendency to focus on one particular topic.

Finally, game type can also be understood as game format. While most designs were developed with PC games in mind, two designs did go against the trend. On the one hand, there is group 7's 'Buried Alive', which is a mobile phone app, as visible from the group's UI sketch on their poster, and there is also the untitled design by group 8 that was conceptualised as an analogue board or card game, rather than a digital game as visible from the group's discussion during the design process.

> *"R   Is this a board game or card game?*
> *O   I think it's a bit of both"* (Group 8)

Compared to the games from workshops 1 and 2, 'Buried Alive' features less cards and less variety among individual card sets. One Goal, 'be the best', one

Method, 'campaigning', two Areas, 'Personal level of politics' and 'environment' as well as 'agency' and values' for Engagement. The (mobile) game is thus fairly focused on what it sets out to do, promoting recycling. Furthermore, being 'only' an app, it can be more difficult to include more in-depth gaming mechanics as this would make it increasingly 'heavy' in its play style and potentially less easy to use. This tendency is strengthened by theexample game the group modelled some of their ideas on, 'Pokemon Go'.

> *"AL   We could use like GPS to tell you where your local recycling*
> *points are and you get points for walking over and…. Like, do you*
> *remember Pokemon GO? […] So like Pokemon Go style, gps based,*
> *you'd like that?"* (Group 7)

Mobile games tend traditionally to be on the lighter side, and this is also the case with this example as mapped out through its card usage.

Group 8's analogue game on the other hand is not as easily described through its card usage as the group only included two cards in its design. These two cards are the Goals 'survival' and 'Simulation', a combination that by itself has not been chosen by any other design and thus makes comparisons more difficult. Given how many game mechanics in digital games can also be translated into 'analogue gaming', and the other way around, as well as one supporting the other (Hartelius et al., 2012; Trammell, 2019), the lack of cards can furthermore not be easily explained by the game's format. When looking at the poster, it however becomes clear that this group had a very different approach to developing their design, depicting player characters, game set-up and individual game rules in written and drawn form. Moreover, the workshop transcript shows that they did indeed use the cards as well as the design cues, but opted instead to develop their own game mechanisms and rules that were inspired by digital games and depicted on the poster.

> *N   So you're saying we just take some random ones and…? Could*
> *be fun!*

> O   *I guess….. I guess we can just look at all the cards and….*
>
> R   *Just brainstorming*
>
> *[…]*
>
> N   *Maybe we could already get some ideas from this*
>
> *This is so inspiring…. This is a method to group…?*
>
> O   *These are themes or groups? […] These are methods […..]*
>
> O   *These are goals, we look through these….. What's the red?*
>
> R   *Area* (Group 8)

The small number of cards used on the poster is thus more a matter of how the group decided to pursue the design process rather than the inability or the ideation cards to work for analogue games as well.

Turning this around the above two examples also show that the ideation card set works for games of different formats and platforms, may they be digital or analogue, and is thus, again based on the experiences made through the workshops, proven to be universally applicable.

(Group-) Discussions during the workshop

Games discussed in earlier parts of the workshops are found to be also a factor or at least a discussion topic when designing the games. This was particularly evident in workshop 1 with the game 'Grand Theft Auto'. The title was initially chosen for both game design analysis and politics in games framework exercises. Participants had thus gained a level of awareness and knowledge of the game.

For Group 1, it became a key reference point when discussing various parts of their game design. Beginning with the basic scheme of the notion of playing an 'anti-hero', but in a different context.

> *"B: So, I was thinking, Grand Theft Auto has this anti-hero thing…*
>
> *A: Yeah, Yeah… you're, on the surface you're the bad guy, but really…..*
>
> *Actually [speaking towards F], do you want us to spread the recorders*

around? So we will take this one closer [moves recorder]. I assume this
is still recording…. Excellent. So yeah, the anti-hero thing?
B: Yeah, so I was thinking of the situation of elections. So like, how
different sources of strategies done by the right people influence
elections, like rigging elections."

The game was discussed again when considering game mechanics and overall
design as

"B: So would it be like missions, like Grand Theft Auto? Or would that
be too complicated? I mean …[cough] game, but...
A: These are things you can do, but how you actually do them could
be…. (menus)
B: Yeah, I was just thinking of missions, Grand Theft Auto missions,
like….
A: You actually got to drive and do the beating, yeah okay. You're
basically… is like, in Grand Theft Auto, you're a petty criminal or
whatever in the world, in this case you're an employee of, you're an…
what do you call? A campaign…?"

While these kind of missions in a open world game world are not unique to
Grand Theft Auto, its usage here seem to be particularly linked and associated
with it.

The connection to Grand Theft Auto was further strengthened, when
discussing a potential name for the designed game.

"B: Mhh… just need a name now
A: Mhh, right, so I was thinking about this,…. Can't do 'Will of the
People', 'Spin or Fix' isn't it, 'Buying it'? No. Mhh…. Grand Theft
Elections […] Grand Theft Vote! Grand Theft Vote or Grand Theft
Election?
B: Grand Theft Vote!
A: Grand Theft Vote, okay." (Group 1)

While the other group in this workshop also referred to Grand Theft Auto in the process, any associations were more of a comparative nature

> "P   Yes, or I suppose I think. Yes, I'm imaging it sort of a… really boring version of GTA.
> N   Yes." (group 2)

as well as when talking about open world setting in general.

The previously discussed games thus also work as 'reference games' during the design tasks. Referencing different games thus allows for easier comparisons and communication of concepts as well as overall structure when discussing original game ideas.

Current affairs, e.g. the case and state of 'Brexit' found its away both in the pre-design discussion as well as later during the game design phase.

> "S   Okay, let me think…
> AL   Brexit! The Brexit …. The Brexit simulator
> S   Oh, that would be fantastic!
> M   Oh,.. god… (sigh)" (Group 7)

Discussing something as a precursor to the design exercise thus does not always lead to it also being positively used and further used in the final game design. This might also have to do with the kind of games under discussion in the group settings prior to the game design exercise. While workshop 1 decided to discuss and analyse GTA twice, workshop 2 chose the Civilization series and Age of Empires and workshop 3 the Mario Brothers series and Monopoly. The games in group 3 are a lot more straightforward in their goal and design, a platformer with the goal to get to the end of the level and board games, with the goal being of making as much money as possible, compared to the other two workshops which allow for more freedom as to how the game is played and often having more than one victory condition. They are therefore also more flexible in regard to being adjusted and modified in order for participants to build their own game upon it. Or

alternatively, they are also not being as influential as reference as previous games, seeing that most games show little resemblance to these games. For future workshops, it is thus of importance to consider example games ahead of time to minimise any unwanted effects on the participant designed games. Similarly, debating 'Brexit' which happened in workshop 3 is again only allowing for a very particular situational context to be used in. Based on participant M's reaction it is also a topic that if anything is rather ambivalent, making it more difficult to find a consensus within the group.

6.2.5.3. Other observations

The two (dominant) approaches to the design process

Based on transcript recordings, observations during the workshops and feedback from participants, there were in general two main ways the design process proceeded.

The first of these saw participants either start with an idea for a game right away. This was easier to achieve or more likely the case when there were less participants in a group. This can be seen with group 4 which started with three ideas and had to then first decide which one to pursue.

> *"I don't mind. I have three already put on my paper there, that I had ideas while you are talking, I put them three down, I'm just deciding which one."* (Participant G, group 4)

Group 5 similarly started with a concrete idea as the above quote about the game being a 'solution' to the situation in Greece was discussed at the very beginning of the design process. Group 1 also started with a basic idea and theme.

> *"B: So, I was thinking, Grand Theft Auto has this anti-hero thing…*
> *A: Yeah, Yeah… you're, on the surface you're the bad guy, but really…..*

Actually [speaking towards F], do you want us to spread the recorders around? So we will take this one closer [moves recorder]. I assume this is still recording…. Excellent. So yeah, the anti-hero thing?

B: Yeah, so I was thinking of the situation of elections. So like, how different sources of strategies done by the right people influence elections, like rigging elections." (Group 1)

Once the initial idea was set, there would be further discussions, using other materials such as the ideation card set, design cues or the framework to build the game up. One participant describing this in the feedback session as

"We start just thinking at the concept. The cards were useful later on when we tried to better define the game narrative & design".

The ideation cards and the frameworks were furthermore used to check whether the game was still within the boundaries of what was of interest as well as to verify the approach and ideas. This is also evident from the feedback received at the end of the workshop, as is discussed further below. Once the game idea was developed to a tangible level, it would be put down on the poster, as witnessed during the workshop. This process could also helpful to even further flesh out examples and concepts of the game.

Alternatively, groups would start from scratch without any previous ideas or only could agree on an initial theme or issues they wanted to address.

"NI   So you're saying we just take some random ones and…? Could be fun!

O   I guess….. I guess we can just look at all the cards and….

R   Just brainstorming" (group 8)

Instead of the above discussed process, they would use mainly the ideation cards as well as other materials such as the design cues or the framework to come up with a basic idea and then add further elements with the ongoing help of the provided materials.

Participants' perception vs reality

As mentioned above, there is a certain discrepancy between what has been overtly used on the posters and what participants reported in the feedback form. This is true for the Politics in Games framework, which was only used on the poster by group 5 and 7, as well as the concept and definition papers about game elements, game genres and political concepts. The latter is not often picked up on the transcripts apart from group 7 commenting on the number of pages being too many,

> *"M   [whispering] Way too many (…) sheets.*
> *S   [whispering] Yeah, way too much"*

yet they were also mentioned as being used and found useful by participants in the feedback session. It is thus of question whether this was really the case or if participants used them non-verbally such as reading by themselves or whether they simply mention them as they were asked about them, though this would only be true for the framework.

Different participants and groups had also a slightly different understanding and use of framework vis-à-vis the ideation cards. Some participants considered the cards to be merely a different form or implementation of the framework. This is only partially true as the cards were based on the framework but differently structured and more detailed than the framework, especially in regards to building up a game. As mentioned above, and potentially also based on this different understanding, different groups used the cards in different ways, either as a way to create ideas and add elements or alternatively as a way to check and validate the design. The latter comes closest to how the framework was understood in general. Due to this variety in perceived use cases, there was also a difference in how useful participants found the cards and framework, as is discussed further below.

Participants' perceptions of cards and the concepts used on them and elsewhere were further influenced by their prior knowledge and experience, as those with a deeper understanding of politics and political concepts were less likely to ask the facilitator for clarifications.

An example of this is also the use of 'informal politics', which even though it was described both on the card and previously in the workshop, was used several times in a different way than planned for by the facilitator.

Similarly, participants at times had the feeling of knowing about politics while actually not being aware of the terms and their meanings. Thus, when facing the meaning of certain terms and concepts as used in the workshop, they became slightly confused.

> *"Well in my personal case the politics bit was a bit harder to grasp in terms of well, I'm familiar with politics I guess in just the democratic sense of the word. But, I mean it involves so many other things that I didn't take into account. So yes, it was kind of…because it's kind of like a fuzzy area of things. So, yes."* (Participant B, group 1)

The same case is also an example of how someone might be aware of local or national situations, in group 1's case illegal election influencing, but lacking the deeper understanding of how these situations come about and thus are not guaranteed to be correctly represented in the game. In the case of group 1 this was balanced by both using the cards, asking the facilitators as well as the personal interest and knowledge about politics in general of the other group members. Misunderstandings are thus a danger to the overall design and any goals of engaging others, but can be overcome by other factors.

The final point to consider about participants' perception is how they would categorise the games in regards to genre and game types. For example, group 5 was considering their game, Debtopia, a 'role play game' even though it did

not feature any elements usually considered with traditional role play games. Others however might have considered the same game a simulation or strategy game. This makes comparisons between games harder, as each group looked at their title with different perceptions and understanding of the matter at hand.

Types of politics featured and how it is reflected in the designs and material use

Looking at how politics are represented and depicted in the game designs, certain trends between workshops and individual games can be found. These differences are also reflected in the designs themselves, giving each depiction of politics its own design profile, which will be discussed below.

One trend between workshops is a divide between those focusing on politics in an institutional sense and those considering more informal expressions of politics. 'Informal' in this sense does however not only mean 'informal politics' in the way of the cards or the framework, influencing the political process outside of the classic institutions associated with it, but also in the alternative way of understanding the term in the literature (Radnitz, 2011). In this way, informal politics also refers to the unofficial dealings between members of these institutions themselves, with aspects of the world outside of them such as bribes as well as the unwritten rules that often permeate these structures but are not to be found in any constitution or legal texts.

In the designs this divide is found between games in workshops 1 and 2, and workshop 3. The former both feature elements of institutional politics, the electoral campaigns in group 1, the social structure and how different parts of this structure interact with the institutions in group 2 – those it can be argued also include elements of informal politics -, city building and managing in

group 3, the government as antagonist in group 4 and the player as part of the government in group 5.

Workshop 3 on the other hand is a lot more informal and personal overall. Group 6 is focusing on the problems of social media, fake news and social capital, group 7 tries to promote recycling, group 8 – while portraying the working of the institutions from a ministerial point of view, is equally interested in personal gains and power plays between politicians and finally group 9 is depicting a dystopian world with the playing going in between the institutional and unofficial parts of the state structure in search of the 'truth'.

In regard to this influencing the designs overall, the most obvious point is the use of 'forms of politics' cards. While all designs of the first two workshops use at least one of them, three out of five even use both, none of the designs from workshop 3 uses any of them, taking political structures completely out of their considerations for the overall design. This is further emphasized by the lack of Methods cards usually associated with institutional politics such as law making or distributive powers. Instead, only three Methods cards are used at all over four designs, with the one being used 2/3 of the time being campaigning, the most common elements of informal politics. In these games, the player has very limited influence over the political process in a traditional way contrary to workshops 1 and 2, where the minimum of Methods used is 4. It is thus also a difference between having a lot of ways to interact with the game and politics in the game, versus limited influence and/or ways to interact with it.

In addition to the institutional vs. informal divide between workshops, there is also a difference between how politics are characterised and portrayed between games.

Group 1/Grand Theft Auto portrays the institutions and individuals and their 'fixers' who are trying to become or stay part of them as bad and power hungry, as they happily use dishonest methods to stay in power and 'rig' the

populace's opinions in their favour, as described the by quote above. Group 4's World Goals is showing both good and bad sides of politics, though here the government is seen as problematic and authoritarian, while the player side as grass-roots activists is presented as the true 'saviours of democracy'.

> *It starts, as I said with the elections being won, and then of course you enter the game, and you're trying basically to oppose the government and try to make the world a better place, which is the final goal.*
> (Participant G, Group 4)

A middle ground to this is found in group 8's institutional simulation, which pairs personal power gain with popular approval and the certain need to compromise and find consensus between players.

> *O   These guys and the rest are sort of cooperating, but some goals are against each other. There has to be some sort of compromise….*
> *[…]*
> *So basically everyone once per term (…) try and discuss whether you want to implement this kind of…. So the bill will have a sort of consequence and a cost and maybe as a form of negotiation … I could give you some of my resources if you support this bill, sort of a trade*
> *N   Yeah, Yeah… Maybe you just need to, because it could be like the typical dilemma, one card is a building, it increases income, but it costs money, there is this….*
> *O   Conflict of interest…*
> *N   Yeah, yeah….so the (game of the turn??) is like you bought a plan, which is bills you want to implement, or you need to implement, then there is a negotiation round where you can talk and then there is voting round…..* (Group 8)

Then, the other side of the spectrum is portrayed in group 5's Debtopia, where the player as part of the government tries to save the country from its ongoing sovereign debt problem and is thus very much 'the good guy'.

> *[…] the role of the player is to actually become the country's governor or president, and they… and save it from going bankrupt eventually. So, the interesting part in this is that it's a whole institutional roleplay game.* (Participant T, Group 5)

Finally, there is also Group 9's dystopian 'Man with no name/Christal Palace' where the protagonist is literally just a 'cog in the machine' of the omnipotent government and thus outside of the good/bad scale initially. Contrary to the other games, here the player actually has a choice, do they choose to go on with their previous life as a government agent or will they try to change things by going out to find the 'truth' and join rebel forces.

> *"The politics is the player is within the justice system as we said, a mid-level government agent tasked with maintaining the status quo"* (Participant M, Group 9)

The design themselves make it difficult to differentiate between games where politics is associated with good or bad things as there is no unique design pattern to each. The only visible difference is when both (group 4) are portrayed or the player is fairly powerless as in group 9. In group 4 the past number of Area and Methods cards both reflect the abilities of government and activists, and as such covers most form of formal and informal politics depicted in the cards. The case of being a 'powerless cog in the machine' on the other side is represented by a lack of options and Methods – the only one being use of force as exercised by the dystopian government.

However not all groups choose to characterise the politics and institutions in their games as something inherently good or bad. While group 2's 'From day2day' investigates the politics of the social structure and its relationship with various institutions, it does so in a more descriptive, non-judgemental way that leaves it to the player to 'find the message' and become aware of the underlying factors and dynamics at play.

> *"So, we have our sort of initial working type is from day to day. It's the idea of linking politics to sort of day to day mundane situations with sort of wider political issues. So, we had the idea of you start off the game, you pick yourself a character which is either well certain characteristics being race, gender and sort of level of education and that sort of thing"* (Participant P, group 2)

This is also represented by the way various cards were chosen, leaving out any Areas outside of everyday and instead presenting the player with Methods that change depending on the player character's social status and the overall need to survive and thrive.

Similarly neutral is group 3's Environment City, which instead of politics being a good or bad thing, focuses on the institutional structures of local politics and how the people making decisions in those structures can influence the growth of the city space and what effect the environment and sustainable actions and thoughts can have on the overall process.

> *"The idea of this game is to protect the environment as the goal at the end. So, to try to teach to the person who is playing how the environment process, or how sustainable processes or activities can improve the quality of the city and the population"* (Participant AB, Group 3)

As mentioned above, this is represented in the way the game's focus is more on economics, trade and environment and blends out the social issue and justice component, to it as seen by its card usage focusing on these areas.

Finally, two games, group 6's Like & Lies and group 7's Buried Alive depict the realm of personal politics. While not being on the same scale of 'bad vs good' as described above, both games have certain core values and considerations as their foundation, and both use a point gaining system and high scores as a

means to create competition between players and make them continue playing.

> *"S   I mean, what do you want to achieve?*
>
> *M   Like a game reward*
>
> *S   You want to achieve behaviour change?*
>
> *AL   Yeah*
>
> *S   You want to achieve campaigning and information, and get people informed about the whole decision?*
>
> *AL   Yes, it's informing and encouraging….*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *M   If it's more like having a leader board and people try to get on top of the leader board*
>
> *AL   The top of recycler!*
>
> *M   Yes, then I'm the top recycler the top recycler in my area, my region, my country, yeah! People would strive…. People would want to do that! People give up their jobs to try and find….."* (Group 7)

> *"P   As different players playing this, you are encouraged to like or share these stories as everyone's stories that are contributing to this on the news feed. So you get points for those. More points for sharing. But you don't necessarily know which ones are the likes and the lies. And this is where I am not sure we have quite nailed it down as there would need to be some mechanism of being able to expose the lies. So you get more points for a lie...*
>
> *DI   For sharing truthful stories."* (Group 6)

Overall, the games are thus more interested in the individual gamer and their behaviour and ethics. There is however still a difference between these two, as only group 7 chose 'values' and 'personal politics' as part of their design. Group 6 on the other hand focus on 'social issues' and thus uses the associated card. The game links the individual and its actions to the larger

society and what is happening in it through the vehicle of social media. The space of informal, more individual focused games can thus be quite diverse and expressed in a variety of design choices.

6.3. Feedback from the workshops and reflections on using the framework as a generative and creative tool

While the feedback from the session was already tangentially discussed, it seems prudent to consider it in more detail

After the end of the design exercise, once all groups had presented their games, feedback forms were handed out to participants. These included six questions: two questions about whether participants thought they would have learnt something about politics, activism or games through the workshop and if so, what it was. The next two questions were about the workshop itself. The first in regards to having gained awareness of using games for activism and engagement and the second about general likes and dislikes of the whole workshop. The last two questions were individually focusing on the ideation cards and the framework and their uses.

The vast majority of participants said that they did learn something by participating in the workshop. The exact extent to this differed between participants. While some said they had learnt something about games or politics, for most it was the connection between games and politics that was new to them.

Similarly, when asked about a change in their awareness of issues, the most frequent answer was in regard to the relationship between politics and games. However, at least two participants also mentioned how the workshop

had changed their awareness of what 'politics' actually entails and where politics can be found in many situations of everyday life.

"*When we were developing our own game, it struck me how similar our (and everyone else's) games were to real life and real politics.*"

Only two participants out of the total 19 said that they did not learn anything significantly new, one of them saying that they had worked on games as tools for engagement prior during their masters degree and thus already had a good understanding of the field. For this participant however the workshop served as confirmation of their own beliefs about games' ability to engage an audience with difficult topics. The other of the two participants said that the workshop made him reflect on other related things, which in turn would influence his future PhD research.

The workshop itself was considered a positive experience overall by all participants. This started off by participants enjoying the overall atmosphere:

"*The mood/feel of the workshop was really nice and relaxed and this promoted comfortable conversation".* This was echoed by others mentioning how enjoyable the group discussions were, not least due to the 'safe space' policy in place, as well as meeting participants with other backgrounds, while also learning about game design. One participant went as far as describing it as a "*very motivational workshop*". Considering how difficult talking about politics in public and with strangers can be, these are very reassuring comments.

The one point of critique that was brought up by three participants was the amount of additional material, e.g. concept 'cheat sheets' given to participants as part of the design exercise. One said that they felt "*overwhelmed with sheets, cards, framework and prompts, but turned out to be useful to facilitate [our] group discussion*", this was echoed by another

saying that there was "*lots of papers, but every single one was useful for me*" when doing the design exercise.

Ideation cards and framework were both overwhelmingly seen as positive and useful tools. The two were however often used for different tasks and purposes.

The primary uses for the cards participants mentioned were focused on their generative qualities, saying that they were "*very useful for generating a game*". A sentiment that was shared among participants. Creation was however not the only use case, as "*they were very useful, both as tools in the actual ideation and as reminder of things to be considered*" and another adding that "*the cards help control your thoughts should you drift off topic. They help keep you on track*". Participants thus experienced the cards as a driving force during the design tasks, another participants mentioning that the cards would "*summarise the knowledge and drive the design session*". This structuring ability was echoed by other participant saying that "*allowed us to stay focused on particular areas/goals*". Other feedback also mentioned a potential verifying quality the cards could have saying that "*the cards were useful to generate / and, or confirm idea*". Others mentioned how the cards were a good connecting tool between their general idea for a game and the Politics in Games framework, while others said that "*the ideation cards definitely helped us to take the game in a more unpredictable direction, rather than just copying some existing game*". The latter is a hint how the cards can also be used as a tool to move participants away from the danger of sticking to a known design, as discussed above.

Only one participant said that they found other supplies more useful "*I used some of them [the cards] but the papers and explanation before already helped me develop my idea in detail. Actually, the cards were useful for little details/mechanics*", and thus coming back to the notion that cards are good to push a general design idea further. Other minor complaints or points of constructive criticism were that participants wanted more time to get

acquainted with the cards and how to use them as well as ideas for adding further cards and categories.

Conversely, the framework was more associated with giving structure, allowing to view the 'bigger picture' or give deeper meaning to things, as well as, in its own way, a tool to guide participants in their design endeavours. It was described as "*very useful, it helped me structure my thoughts*" and "*the framework helps to structure what is needed within the games*". As well as saying that "*the framework was very good in helping me 'situate' the game*" and "*the framework was really helpful and really interesting for this kind of work, […] to understand all the reasons behind any game*".

It was further found useful to aid in remembering and connecting passive knowledge as it "*really helped to put all the implicit knowledge I had into a formal 'order' and showed me new connections and ways of thinking about the topics of both politics and games*". This guiding and connecting quality also helped in overcoming disagreements, as one participant remembers "*when designing the game, it was particularly quite difficult to come to an agreement, until we began using the framework in place*", giving it almost the position of being a mediator between different parties and points of view.

Again, participants would have preferred a bit more time to properly engage with the framework, going as far as suggesting "*I think we may have got more out of the framework if we had been forced to use it more than we were. We found that we generated an idea first then turned to the cards afterwards*". The design process and using the cards and framework in it were held purposefully open to using any material participants preferred, so this feedback is reassuring in so far as participants found the tools provided useful and wanted to use them even more than they ended up doing during the workshop.

The ideation cards were thus, as intended, the main creative driving force, apart from participants' own ideas, in the creative process, while also providing some guidance and (positive) limitations to participants. The

feedback on the other hand provided structure to put the game design against, again providing a form of guidance, that could even have a mediating character, but on a bigger scale, while the cards were more focused on detail.

Based on this feedback and the other outcomes of the workshop, it seems that the framework and the cards based on it, were overall successfully used as design and generative tools.

While this outcome was what was expected and hoped for, participants willingness to get involved in the workshop at large, especially the discussions about various elements of politics, came as a surprise, considering that politics can be a difficult topic to talk about for some. The workshop further supplied valuable indications for what future work and iterations of the card and work on designing and using games for (political) engagement may look like.

6.4. Conclusion

Planning and conducting the games design workshop revealed a lot about using the framework in a generative environment as well as what influences the process of designing politically (engaging) games in a mixed group environment.

Initially, it became clear that the framework would need to be made more accessible in order to use it in a general design context. This for example included reducing the amount of previous knowledge about politics and game design needed to use it without having to spend a lot of time explaining prior concepts and ideas. It was found that ideation cards are a good medium to transfer the framework into a design tool. The main tasks when developing the cards conceptually was how to simplify and collapse the framework categories without taking away the nuances the framework could provide as well as finding a middle ground between the reality of gaming, games and

politics vs. making a concise design tool and thus creating an appropriate model of the former.

When designing politically engaging games, many elements influence the design process overall. Some of them are from the inside, brought in by the designers and their experiences, others come from the outside, such as the materials used or other things that are part of the workshop process.

Having recruited a mixed group of participants with varying degrees of prior political and game design knowledge, it seems that more participants had an easier time as well greater pre-understanding of the basic notions of games and game design than those related to politics.

Having greater and formal educational knowledge of politics was shown to be a greater influence on the general idea for a game than to those participants with formal training in game design. Participants with formal political education also were more likely to address and portray institutional structures in their games.

Participants would use existing games as comparison and communication aids during the workshop, both in terms of design and technology used, but also as a way to verify the feasibility of an idea, similar to a proof of concept. Being overly familiar with certain game types however also came with the danger and temptation of simply copying an existing design, with minor changes if at any. Participants reported that the cards helped them to overcome this.

An important point featuring in many group discussions was the tense relation between the focus on delivering a certain message contrary to having an entertaining, fun and well-designed game. Different participant groups dealt with this in different ways.

Participants different experiences, both personal and professional, influenced the overall game design also. One example of this is participants' different nationalities and experience of 'politics' both at home and in the United Kingdom. Again, different approaches to overcoming and closing these

differences were found between groups. Some of these included focusing on one group member's experience – with that member teaching the others about this in the process of designing the game, making the setting and politics as universal as possible or alternatively choosing a completely different, potentially fictional setting.

In regard to inside influences on the design process, differences between individual workshops both in terms of materials used and kinds of games developed were observed. These had a variety of reasons, which were also reflected in cards and materials used.

Overall, the ideation card set – together with the general tasks sheet/design cues distributed – were the most commonly used materials, followed by the framework, then other materials. Even less often used materials such as the concept 'cheat sheets' provided, were considered useful by participants based on their feedback. Group discussions prior to the design exercise also were found to have an influence on what games participants designed.

There appeared to be two main approaches to designing the game and using materials supplied. The most popular one focused on coming up with a basic idea for the game first, then using materials for working out the details and structuring the design process. Fewer groups started off with the materials without any prior basic notion of what kind of game they planned to develop.

Furthermore, there was an observable difference between what participants subjectively perceived they knew about a subject, particularly in regard to politics and games, contrary to their objective knowledge. This brought with it the potential for some issues being wrongly or inappropriately portrayed, however longer time to research and design the game might have prevented this outside the constraint setting of the workshop.

Participants found both framework and ideation cards to be useful and good tools to design a politically engaging game. They were however used for different reasons, the cards had a more creative and driving quality, whereas

the framework provided a structure and the possibility to consider the 'bigger picture', among other things.

Overall, the workshop thus showed that the framework – both in its original and its card form – is a useful tool for enabling individuals with different backgrounds to create games with underlying political themes and also makes them appreciate the political side of games in general more. It furthermore provided input for future iterations of the ideation cards and path for future research.

7. Politics in Games – overall discussion and conclusion

7.1. Introduction

Having investigated the position and perception of politics from various perspectives, it is now time to take a step back, look at the bigger picture and put the findings into perspective.

This will be done by initially giving a short overview of the research's results, then putting them into context with one another and the literature at large, leading to an overall conclusion.

7.2. Politics in games – (mis-)perceptions and attitudes

When first approaching the topic of politics in games and how games could be used as a tool to increase players' interest in politics and overall political engagement, it became apparent that the existing situation and landscape of both 'political games' or games with politics in them as well as those parts of the (gaming) population that already play games that fall into this category needed to be further examined, as the existing literature had not done so in a general and different games-spanning way. This was done not only to better understand the relationships between politics, games, engagement and players, but also to gain directional input for future research.

This was the background against which the first study was undertaken. A landscaping exercise in the shape of an online survey to receive a better understanding of the existing situation with regards to politics in video games. The study focused on surveying players of 'political games', meaning games with politics in them, their (gaming) habits and political attitudes. Asking the players directly was also done in order to compare what would be an 'experts' expectation of the situation, as based on the literature contrary to what the players themselves perceived.

To do that, the first question to explore was thus *who are the players of political games (or games with politics in them in general)*. This included both general demographics, factors such as education, but also politics and games specific aspects such as interest in politics and engagement in political activities as well as gaming habits and attitudes. Knowing these factors would furthermore allow to comparison of this group with typical general gamer types and groups as discussed in the literature.

The sample population surveyed in the study (N=2158) was predominately well educated, in the age groups of 18 to 34 and fairly interested in politics overall, with many engaging in at least one type of activity connected to political engagement. Their motivations and gaming habits were similar to those found among the general gaming population (Schuurman et al., 2008; Tychsen et al., 2008). Certain types of gaming styles and goals in playing games were however slightly differently expressed, e.g. the roleplay aspect of gaming is in real situation of history with individuals are known and associated with this era. It is much more a way of re-enacting for some, or finding alternative solutions to historic situations, rather than the complete escapism into a made-up world or scenario. Though the latter obviously is dependent on the kind of game referred to by participants. This is also reflected in the literature on re-building or re-enacting history though games, showing just how difficult it is to be historically 'correct', while also building an emotional connection to the player (Rejack, 2007) and an enjoyable and 'fun' experience built upon the expectations of typical elements of current commercial games (Kapell & Elliott, 2013). Unfortunately, no comparison between the political interest in 'normal' gamers exists, making it difficult to compare the two groups in this regard.

Having gained a better understanding of the people playing games with strong elements of politics in them, the next step was to see *how and what they themselves perceived as 'politics in games' or 'political games' as well as what they saw as 'politics' in (video) games*. Again, the latter needed to be comparable in the 'lay' opinion with what would be conceived as such

through the lenses of political science. Participants' perception of politics in games was very institutionally focused, with different bodies of government, nations, leaders or cities, in the forefront of the discussion. Games with politics in them were very strategically heavy, as genre and activity were both linked to it, often associated with a certain period of history, but not necessarily so. Finally, the political aspects most often connected to politics in games were different forms of use of force, e.g. through military actions, and negotiations and diplomacy. Again, most often seen in the space of institutional politics rather than informal activities. This, when remembering the discussion of politics in board games in chapter 2, is not a situation limited to digital games, but, especially when thinking about the history of wargames (Creveld, 2013), seems to be a characteristic of many commercial games targeted to the adult population.

Having investigated the first two questions enabling the consideration of *the relationship between players, the games they played and their view on politics as well as their political interest and engagement*.

The survey's data showed a general relationship between playing political games and being interested in politics. This was also true for playing said games and being engaged into politics in at least one way. This was also reflected in two thirds of the sample population being aware of playing political games, which may also be reflected in their general awareness of being politically engaged in general. This connection between playing games and higher levels of political interest and engagement varied however between games, with those more complex and focused on particular periods of history having a stronger association. While a correlation between the two obviously does not equal a causation of the same, these are nevertheless interesting results that encourage a further investigation into the relationship between the two, players' perception of politics and how games could further political engagement, especially in the area of commercial rather than serious games as the latter have received more attention from the literature previously (Neys & Jansz, 2010; Young et al., 2012).

The overall *contribution* of this chapter is a better understanding of the 'politics in games' space in a way previously unseen in the literature that apart from games such as Civilization has, as just discussed, had a stronger focus on serious and 'made for a purpose' games. We gained better insights into the players playing political games as well as the relationship between gaming/playing games with politics in them and general political interest and engagement. This overall, enables us to have a solid foundation on which to build and inform future work, especially regarding political engagement.

Thus, these findings were also one of the motivations for what followed in the next chapters and the overall cause of the research.

With the overwhelming majority of participants associating politics in games with institutional politics, the notion to find a way to make parts of politics in games less visible, but unnoticed by players, such as identity politics, social commentary or ideologies, more visible was provoked. This was paired with the need for easier and better comparison of games and the necessity for an overall shared understanding and language of politics in games in order to facilitate talking about politics in games and contrast games' ability to politically engage. The observed difference, between what players versus that which a political science informed expert might perceive, illustrated the need for this to work for both groups in order to profit equally from it. There was thus the need for a joint foundation in order to allow for a holistic conceptualisation and discussion of politics in games.

7.3. A Framework for Politics in Games

As a reaction to the above findings, it was decided to develop a tool in the shape of a framework through which to address them. The framework is therefore an attempt to develop a foundation and common ground to further the discussion of politics in games/political games and how they could be used to promote political engagement.

One might initially question the need for a common ground in this area. There are however several good reasons to do so. First, having a common ground and approach enables all stakeholders to better compare and understand each other when talking about politics in games. It is also one way to approach the issues of certain areas of politics being potentially 'hidden' from the casual observer, who is less aware that politics is a lot more than just institutions and instead can be found in many different spaces, even in games, including large areas of everyday life. *The framework is thus an answer to the question whether it is possible to provide a common foundation for discussions of politics and games*, touching on both the area of analysing and understanding games as well as creative and design activities.

Contrary to other approaches, both on political participation in games and game categorisation in general, the framework is informed by political science's understanding of the matter, including the definition of politics, connected concepts as well as factors contributing to political engagement and increased interest in politics, while also keeping in mind the practice of and concepts from game design such as having basic mechanics leading to dynamic responses through input that lead to an emotional response by the player, including stronger engagement with the game (Hunicke et al., 2004).

The main *contribution* of the framework is thus two-fold. Firstly, there is the conceptual framework investigating both general politics in games as well as allowing for a focus on political engagement, which has not been attempted

before. Secondly, there is the fact that it and this doctoral research, are informed by two broader areas rarely associated with one another: Political Science and Political Psychology, incorporating Computer Science, Game Studies and Game Development. Previous attempts in this direction were usually education or design informed (see chapter 2). The framework is thus a chance to investigate how these two different domains can be used and benefit from each other.

When considering who the framework should be for, it was decided to cater for three distinct user groups. The main two groups are interested players or general 'lays' that want to better understand the games they play (as surveyed in the initial landscaping study) and what can be described as 'expert' users, researchers, journalists and general professionals, such as designers, interested in gaming and/or politics, including research such as this. These two were complemented by a third group, those interested in political engagement. This group was held separately as it could include both lays/amateurs and professional activists. All these different groups have a very different base understanding of politics and games, which all need to be catered and accounted for. The framework is designed as a way to level the field between these different groups and make politics and games easier to understand and approach.

It was furthermore decided to make the framework cater for two different use case – the analysis of existing games and the creation and design of new games. Distinguishing between these two became necessary as both activities are very different from one another featuring different approaches and processes of working. In general, when discussing the notion of political engagement through games, only analysing games was considered not enough, as it felt too passive, given how one of the objectives of this research was to find ways to use games for political engagement, including the use of

generative activities allowed for active exploration of this field, without being dependent solely on games that already exist.

Having thus established the basic ideas behind the framework and developed it accordingly as discussed in chapter 4, it still needed to be tested for its usability for both use cases as well as its applicability among different use groups. This was done in the following studies, focusing each on one of the two main activities for which the framework was designed.

7.3.1. The framework as an analytical tool

The first step in testing out the framework was for its capability to be used as a tool for analysis. For this purpose, a second online survey was created, asking participants to use the framework in the shape of an online survey on a game of their choice.

The main question behind the survey was not only *whether the framework in the shape of a questionnaire would allow participants to analyse their game of choice, but also how the (lay) participants would use the questionnaire and what was their general process in doing so*.

While obviously also guided by the shape and nature of the questionnaire, there were nevertheless several observations that could be made from the data. First, the framework did indeed help participants to further engage and analyse the game overall. How this was done however, was the more interesting finding. As discussed in chapter 5, participants tended to use a 'double funnel' approach. They moved from general and formal game elements to the 'essence' of the game, which then fed into the general analysis of the politics in games, which again was 'funnelled down' to less concrete notions such as world views and ideologies, ending with an overall analysis of the game, which was both informed by game design and political

elements. This also gave rise to the idea and image of politics being a 'layer' of its own in the game, that can only or most easily be accessed by going through the top layers of formal game design and other influences.

As mentioned, none of the participants were known to be 'expert' users, but instead 'lays' or regular game players without a particular background in either game design or politics. However they had first-hand experience of the games they chose. The survey, together with example case studies made by an expert user, were thus also a way to *check whether the framework would work for both user groups, layers and 'experts' and whether there was any difference in how they used the framework*.

The results for this should be prefaced with saying that the 'expert' case studies were based on a different, more recent version of the framework as found in the survey, thus slightly limiting the direct ability to compare one to one. It can however still be observed that, when lay participants were willing to fully engage into the analysis process, similar levels of details and description could be achieved compared to the 'expert' case studies. One example for this is *Skyrim* from the Elder Scrolls series. Here both 'expert' and 'lays' located politics in the same areas and categories when analysing the game, thus being able to use the framework with similar overall results. Both expert and lay analysis again show how politics can be seen as a layer in the overall game and its underlying game design.

One of the motivations behind developing the framework was also to make previously 'hidden' politics such as identity politics and social issues more visible and prominent for users. Based on participants' responses in their analysis, this seem to be the case when using the framework. Personal-, identity- and group politics as well as social-economic issues were featured and talked about a lot more often than in the initial study. There was overall less emphasis on institutional politics.

In addition to answering the main research questions behind the study, its results gave further insights and inspiration for what could be added and

changed about the framework, e.g. additional categories, option to give feedback and better catering for games without politics in them.

The overall *contributions* of the study and chapter is two-fold, both relating to the framework as well as the position of politics in games in general. Regarding the first, it is now possible to say that both experts and lay users can analyse on similar levels when using the Politics in Games framework. Moreover, the framework also enables users without previous knowledge to see less visible and less traditional aspects of politics in video games. It helps to talk about and guide the reflection on politics in games for all user groups in ways previously not possible or supported by other design- or conceptual frameworks. Using the framework 'funnels' and strengthens users' perception of the game and the politics in it, giving rise to the notion of participants' using it as a 'double funnel'.

Regarding the second main contribution, it also presents the potential to describe politics as layers in the overall game and game design. This view can help when describing the overarching relationships between different game elements and politics as well as when considering how games can influence political engagement and interest, providing a way to conceptualise the complex relationships and interactions found in this space.

7.3.2. The framework as a tool for creativity

The second part of testing the framework was for its ability to support and be used for generative and creative purposes, in particularly to help create games that try to promote political engagement.

This was done through a game design workshop with a mixed group of participants, having varying backgrounds including game design, political

science and others. In preparation for the workshop, several lessons were learnt from the previous analytical study. Among these was the decision to talk about the different political and game design related concepts with participants first and do practice analyses with each in a group setting to gain a stronger and group-wide joint understanding of them, before considering both together. This led in some way to a reconfiguration of the double funnel notion found in the second survey study. Rather than having one funnel going into another, it was now two smaller funnels next to one another that both led into a third funnel below. Politics and games were thus initially individually considered and then the 'distillate' of each of them was put together and further refined into an overall, holistic analysis. Another observation taken from the experience of the analysis survey study was to give participants the opportunity to give feedback, both on the workshop overall and the framework, at the end of the session.

In addition to the framework, an ideation card set for designing political and engaging games was developed based on the framework as an additional design tool to use during the workshop, which was informed by existing cards for game design (Wetzel et al., 2017). The cards were perceived as very helpful by participants based on their feedback.

Participants were given a variety of materials and tools to use for designing their games in small groups. The issue of interest in this was similar to the study, considering the framework for analysis purposes and *how participants would go about designing their games*. In addition to this, given the framework now existed through the ideation cards in yet another (altered) form, it was also of interest *what role and use the framework would have in this context vis-a-vis the ideation cards* introduced to participants.

In the workshop participants made use of both cards and framework, however for different purposes. The ideation cards were most commonly used to create ideas, ideate as well as facilitate discussion within the groups. The framework on the other hand was most often used as an overall

structure, often in the way of a check list to see if the design prototype would go in the right direction in order to facilitate players' encounter with politics.

Regarding the general process of designing the games, participant groups showed two different approaches. The first, and most common, was ideation led. The groups would decide on a general idea first and then use any available material to further build up their basic notion of what the game should be about. The second approach was more material led, and with this also more framework focused. Participants would work through the provided materials such as the framework or design cues and use the cards as a source of examples to come up with an overall theme and idea for their game.

When considering further influences on designs and the design process apart from material provided, it was observed that designer's background played a significant part in it. Interestingly enough, individuals' national background was even more important than their educational or occupation background. Similarly, being an 'expert' or having a professional education in either the field of political science or game design, e.g. through an university degree, did have some effect but not as prominently as initially assumed. If anything, participants with a background in political science, might have a slightly stronger tendency towards institutional politics. Also, having a lot of previous experience in playing video games seemed to be equally, if not more influential, on the creative process, e.g. through the bringing up of examples from existing ideas rather than having a formal education in game design. Overall, this again shows how the right tool, e.g. the framework and prior discussion in the workshop, can help to bring experts and lays to a closer expertise level for this purpose. Personal background and beliefs feeding into one's designs despite or in addition to education and design experience is not a new phenomenon and also known to happen among professional game developers (Squire, 2006). Both professional and amateur designers thus show similar behaviours in this regard. Finally, discussions prior to the design exercise in the workshops, featured in elements that influenced the game

designs, caused some games and issues to be more present in participants' mind and thus being more likely to influence the design process.

Finally, the workshops and the game designs featured in both institutional and informal forms of politics, which again proved the framework's ability to make both forms of politics to be more visible for io users.

The main *contributions* of testing the framework for its ability to be used in generative circumstances are overall very 'tool' focused. It introduced a novel tool to think about and build politics into games that is very accessible for users of different levels of interest and knowledge of politics and game design. The framework as a design tool, either in its original form or through ideation cards, was furthermore shown to have merit. The approach of combining analytical and creative activities in the workshop also made participant more aware of politics in games and the different forms the politics can take. Such workshops could thus not only be used for design purposes, but also adapted by educators and other interested groups to be used as novel ways to create awareness and further (political) engagement.

7.4. Where does this lead us? Continuing the conversation

Looking back at what has been learnt in the course of this research, several general observations can be made.

First, it has been shown that, if we want to talk about politics and political engagement in and through games, we need a holistic approach. This is to ensure we include potential 'hidden' and less prominent aspects and effects of politics in order to achieve a stable, all-inclusive foundation for any further discussions.

This is necessary as an awareness of what politics can encompass does not exist by itself on lay player level, as the initial study showed, and, as the

literature has already pointed out (Hayes, 2014; Squire, 2006), does not necessarily exist on the professional developer level either. Appropriate tools however, such as the Politics in Games framework, can however lessen the gap between experts on design and politics and interested lays and individuals from other professions. One way the framework's ability to do this its visibility in the variety and diversity between and within the game prototypes from the design workshops, showing the effect on the users and general usage of the framework and its ideation card set to come up with more holistic ideas of how to represent and discuss politics in games. This is also applicable for the use of the framework as a tool for analysis as the 'double funnel' approach by participants in the second survey study shows.

In general, based on observations and feedback from the research, the framework helps users to better talk and reflect about politics. It provides a basis for shared ground and language between both experts and amateurs as well as different interest groups, enabling them to take the discussion on politics in games forward.

7.4.1. The contribution of political science to game design

While the last decade has seen an increase in social science informed study of games (Corliss, 2011), a lot of these stem from the field of sociology. Beside the Politics in Games framework, it is therefore also worth considering what one of the other contributions and novelties of this work, that of introducing political science to the world of technology and game design in particular, has brought to the area and discussion overall.

One of the effects this had, was the revelation of how narrow or limited game developers' and gamers' notion and model of politics was. There was very little understanding of how one's own background and view on the world might be reflected in the games people develop. These shortcomings have

been shown to be addressed and remediated by the inclusion of political science concepts in the design process. The understanding of political behaviour from political science as well as political psychology furthermore allowed for the introduction of new elements and concepts into games design, such as the notion of political agency, that allow for a more refined and specialised approach in making games for (political) engagement. Engaging into this interdisciplinary approach has brought to attention some of the challenges involved in connecting two different disciplines, but it is also encouraging to explore further fields of joint interest.

7.4.2. How to address designers' background and biases?

There is one aspect of politics in games that admittedly has been neglected when developing the framework but should nevertheless be considered and acknowledged. This is the issue of designers' and developers' background and their influence on politics, especially in the shape of in-built values, ideologies and worldviews, in their games. While this was observed and commented on in the game design workshops, it admittedly was not given a lot of space in the framework seeing that there is not a specific value for it. Rectifying this could be done in future iterations of the framework or alternatively be included when considering general values in the game and become a reflective aspect for designers when using the framework for generative purposes.

The omission of the designer's and developer's background is due to the fact that the framework in its current state is intended to be used based on what is observable by playing or watching the game. This was done in order to make it easier to apply to games and be overall more accessible. In-built biases do however often require further research into the game's development process and not necessarily accessible, especially through only

observing the game. One way this could be addressed would be by including the notions of in-built values and biases in an additional optional model to the framework that would e.g. be informed by or taken from Flanagan's work on (designing for) values in games (Flanagan et al., 2007; Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014) or the notion of socio-economic accessibility as found in Meeples Like Us approach to reviewing and criticizing board games (*Meeple Like Us*, 2019). The framework addition would be set and used after going through or using the first two sets, political engagement focused aspects and the general 'bigger picture' approach. In this way the original idea of the framework being based on observation would be preserved, while offering the interested user an opportunity for further more in-depth analysis.

7.4.3.   Encountering politics through the medium of games

While the literature as discussed in chapter 2 is mostly interested in games as direct tools for learning about politics and civic values, the research's findings should also re-encourage consideration of how politics can be generally encountered in (commercial) video games and how these differ from other media such as film or tv series.

Both the case study analyses and the initial survey of gamers show us examples of how politics can feature in games without being explicitly advertised, as in the case in GTA5. As such, games can be argued to be potential locations for 'unintended counters' with politics. While these are traditionally more associated with television or social media outlets during electoral campaign seasons (Hamilton & Tolbert, 2012; Kim et al., 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2001; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2015), the same can be said about games featuring aspects of politics, without being dependent on ongoing political activities in the real world. This comparison is more straightforward when the game world resembles the real world, but there are no findings

suggesting that a fantastic or historic setting cannot 'teach' about politics also. Obviously, players usually do not play games to inform themselves, but for entertainment and escapism. As such, simply consuming games is unlikely to ever become a primary news and political engagement source, but that is understandable and fine as most (commercial) games are not primarily designed to be such things.

An alternative approach to this comes back to the discussion of whether games are art (Bogost, 2012; Jenkins, 2005; Smuts, 2005) and as such as well as being part of mass media (Livingstone, 1999) thus be considered cultural artefacts that have a 'cultural presence' and as such become places to which people turn to find meaning and knowledge about the world around them (Richardson & Corner, 2012). Through this, it can also be argued that players can experience and learn about politics when playing video games. That said, video games and film and tv series are different kinds of media and therefore do not automatically have the same effect and 'way' of depicting and 'teaching' about politics. For one, games are often not quite as close to people's daily life as tv series and especially soap operas can be, instead their settings are often more out of the ordinary. Games are thus unlikely to have the same ability to portray politics in and around the daily life as tv productions have (Coleman, 2008) and as such political 'living' and experiencing will be different through the medium of 'games'. At the same time, games, not least due to their more interactive nature, have the capability to offer higher levels of agency to the consumer, which can for example be further categorised and described through the *Agency* variable in the Politics in Games framework. These higher levels would be a good or better vehicle to express van Zoonen's (2007) notion of 'political self' through playing games. Considering players' response to the initial survey study as well as how they described the player character's position in their games in the framework analysis studies, these assumptions seems to be justified. Similarly, putting the player often in the position of making political decisions, e.g. with the games discussed in the landscaping study, games also show their

ability to show the 'hidden' side of politics with deals and negotiations (Randall, 2011), which can make politics in games more interesting to consumers. This of course requires individuals to actually play games featuring politics in the first place. Similar to the filter bubbles found in social media (Pariser, 2011), there is a chance that unengaged players will not find or play games that are labelled 'political', not least because they might be outside of their and their social media's circle of preferred genres. Considering that already a third of the participants in the landscaping study said that they would not play political games, even though the average interest in politics was fairly high among the overall sample, chances that somebody even less interested in politics would engage into them is likely to be low. A future challenge in studying games for political engagement would be thus to not only make engaging games, but also to encourage unengaged and uninterested individuals to play these games.

At the same time, seeing that there a few ways to correctly the depicting this side of politics through 'official' channels and news, there is also the danger of players being more like to believe any inadequate depictions of it. Considering the negative effects 'fake news' can have on television and social media consumers (Valenzuela et al., 2019; Weeks et al., 2017), it seems likely that other mass media can be equally misused and playing those game could then lead to overall negative attitudes towards the real political process (Balmas, 2014). There have indeed been cases where games have been used to propagate extremist thoughts (Selepak, 2010), which fortunately are usually limited to the internet-circles of these extremist. While none of the games mentioned and featured in this research have been shown to be in any way connected to this, it is nevertheless a problem that needs to be kept in mind for any future discussions of politics in games and how they can be used for engagement.

As this research has shown, when talking about politics in games, it is important to remember that 'politics' is far more than the simulation of institutional politics. It is a complex field that needs expert understanding or additional guidance to navigate and understand fully. The framework is a tool that can be used to help and support both these functions.

With the ongoing development and sophistication of their development processes, video games are a promising medium to further political engagement and interest in individuals. Their higher level of interactivity vis-à-vis traditional media and with this the potential for player agency has a lot of potential to create engagement in a playful way. With the Politics in Games framework as foundation, the next step is now to continue exploring the space and further our understanding of how games can be best used for this endeavour.

7.5. Reflections on the research

What can be further learned from this research's results? First and foremost, there are two main observations. The first is that it is indeed possible to develop and populate a common space for the discussion of politics in games. The space, in the shape of the framework, allows for experts from different fields to come together and contribute to a common project while minimising the potential for misunderstandings based on different use of terminology, e.g. the nature of what is politics and what is political. Furthermore, this common ground or space, allows for meeting of lays and experts to talk about the same object in a meaningful way as the framework allows users without in-depth knowledge of political science to understand politics in games on a closer level, as experts do.

The second general observation is that games can indeed help in promoting politics interest and engagement. While this ability is not necessarily present

in all games that include politics, there are nevertheless many different ways they can do so. There is therefore not one 'right' way to use video games for political engagement, but instead it is important to keep the context, both inside and outside of the game, such as game world, likely player demography etc., in mind and apply the basic concept of political engagement accordingly.

Looking back to the process of exploring the field of politics in games and this research, some valuable lessons can be learnt, that seem important to mention and reflect on as well.

First, there is issue of how to deal with each user's, designer's or developer's personal biases and backgrounds, of which they may not be aware. Using the framework and associated tools in the design and analysis process might enable users to see the politics in front of them better, but it does not require them to take a self-critical look within themselves and question their ideas. While this might be less important when analysing a game, this is an issue that needs to be addressed and considered in future iterations and use of the framework, potentially as part of it or through specific design tasks or cues.

Second, the user groups for which the framework was developed as well as the participants that were recruited for the studies were fairly diverse. This resulted in an equally general-use framework. While this is good in order to become generally aware of the position and location of politics in games, especially when being used by a lay person. This also means that there are probably cases in which a more bespoke approach and framework could be more beneficial and useful for individual groups. Keeping this limitation in mind when using the framework is good and necessary, when trying to make generalisations as well as more focused assumed on something based on the framework.

A third lesson, of learning and growth when researching this topic was the general area of interdisciplinarity. While generally a good and rewarding approach to create new knowledge, bringing together two very broad

disciplines and fields, political science and political psychology with the areas of computer science, game studies and human computer interaction, does also come with its own challenges and unique problems. These included differences in terminology, as well as general research approach and methodologies and even differences in how to 'do' doctoral research and produce a thesis. The combined research efforts of both disciplines is still fairly limited and often either completely informed by one or the other, offering little guidance for my own work.

Before being able to provide a common ground and starting point for future discussions through my research, it was thus necessary to consider where the different contributing areas could initially meet and how to make sure that everything and everyone was speaking the same (research) language in order to minimise the potential for misunderstandings.

A final area of reflection that at least indirectly has influenced the development and some of the outlook of the doctoral research is the state and changes in the political and social landscape on a global level. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the overall rise in popularity of populist and anti-democratic tendencies in parts of the (not just Western-) world give rise to concern (Nagan & Manausa, 2018). With the noise and voices coming from various sources, most prominently among them the relative anonymity of social media sites, one might wonder if this has led to people being more engaged or rather becoming more apathetic in the process. While there is yet no final verdict on these developments, it can certainly be said that many societies have become more divided and polarised in the process.

In addition to this, the ongoing debate and increase in the potential of 'fake news' (Spohr, 2017), well-grounded and factual citizen and political education becomes more important, especially with regard to shared democratic values as a base of joint citizenship. While this research was done in the expressed hope of creating a positive contribution in this field and towards these

activities, the potential danger of abuse or misuse of it, creating engagement though false facts, nevertheless exists and should be kept in mind for any future use and developments.

7.6. Contributions and implications

As already touched on in the discussion in chapter 7, there are a variety of fields and areas to which this research can be said to contribute. The following is an overview of some of these as well as what implications this could have.

- *Game design and research methodology*. The framework and its surrounding research contribute and inform both design and research methods. Not just for providing a novel approach for talking about and including politics into general game design approach such as Schell's Lense for Game Design (2008), but also existing discussions such as designing for and with values (Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014) and the rule of 'activist developers' and how they approach the topics they care about (Neys & Jansz, 2010).

- *Games for (political) education*. Using games for educational purposes has been a practice long before digital games gained popularity (Creveld, 2013) and is also found in the animal kingdom in the shape of play (Gallistel, 1990; Nehaniv & Dautenhahn, 2007; Thorpe, 1966). The research provides an additional approach to consider a game's ability to educate about politics and how to make games that are educational about politics.

- *Design of (commercial) entertainment games*. The research informs the era of (commercial) video game design, by giving designers and

developers a tool with which to reflect on politics and alternative ways to make games engaging.

- *Activism practice*. In response to the above mention of designing with values and 'activist developers', the research also informs common forms of activism through introducing and providing activists with an additional tool and the possibility to captivate an audience. While digital communication technology has been proven useful in organising and outreach of activism (Hill & Hughes, 1998; Poell & van Dijck, 2015), games are not as commonly used yet. The framework and its related work will make using games for activism more accessible.

- *The debate on politics in games*. In addition to individual aspects of design and research, this research is also contributing to further the general discussion on, and awareness of, the existing place and effect of politics on games. Both in an academic surrounding as well as in the general population, game journalism and the debate whether games are political or whether developers' should 'leave politics out of [my] games' (Bown, 2018; Kain, 19 C.E.; Tucker, 2019), giving further evidence to their existence and a tool to discuss this.

- *Politics as represented in the (mass) media*. As previously discussed in chapter 2, there is a collection on literature in mass media such as film and soap operas (Coleman, 2008; Fielding, 2014; van Zoonen, 2007b), both in regards to how it is represented and what effect this representation can have on the viewer. The (academic) field of studying politics in (commercial) video games is comparatively underdeveloped. This research is thus also a contribution to this field and provides a tool to further analyse and compare politics in games.

- *Politics and technology*. The role of information technology in politics is still a comparatively marginalised topic in political science, not generally being featured in most classically taught degree programmes. This may, and should, however change given the ongoing growth in importance of

communication to political behaviour and the political process in general. As such, this research is an effort and contribution in making political science more aware of the opportunities and possible problems technology can bring as a location to study politics. Concurrently given the interdisciplinary nature of this doctoral research, it is also an effort to introduce both computer science and political science to each other and investigate how the two disciplines can learn and work from and with each other.

7.7. Future work

Inspired both by general findings, as well as the contributions and general research field, there are several avenues any future work related to this doctoral thesis open up.

- *Other types of games.* While this research has focused on commercial digital/video games, many of the basic notions and concepts around video games design and playing (digital) games can also be allied to other types of (game) media. The question of interest would thus be whether the framework and the work surrounding it would also stay true and thus be applied to other types of games or whether there would be some kind of adjustments or additions to the variable sets and how they are used. The two most interesting and closely related areas for this would be board games and serious games. As discussed in chapter 2, there are many 'analogue' board games available that have (institutional) politics as a theme. The academic literature on it however is very limited. As such, it would be a contribution to an understudied field. Furthermore, given that one of the games designed during the design workshop, the untitled game of group 8, was already a mixture of card, video and board game, the possibilities for the framework working in this field also seems promising. Another game type that should be considered was serious games. The framework was designed with commercial games made for entertainment in mind. Therefore, while both game types are digital, it seems sensible to

investigate whether all the stated attributes and elements in entertainment games on politics also ring true for serious games or whether certain parts would need to change, either in the likelihood of it being used, e.g. a game mechanism, or added or omitted to the framework. Finally, it would also be worth testing whether the framework or parts of it could be applied to other mass media, e.g. film. This would allow for a better comparison between the existing literature on politics 'on the silver screen' and the one found in games.

- *Further development of the ideation card set.* The cards used during the game design workshop were the initial iteration of the set and in many ways still a prototype. Incorporating some of the feedback and general experience from the workshop would allow further development of the cards beyond prototype status. This would also include specific guidance or options of using the cards in different situations, such as ideating or analysing. Moreover and related to the above observation that the framework was focused on a general rather than specific use case and user group, additional cards for specific user groups, use cases or thematic areas could be developed to provide an easy and flexible way to make the framework more task specific without changing the core idea behind it. Finally, tools for data driven analysis and reflection on ideation processes, such as the Cardographer project (Darzentas et al., 2019) could be used to understand the overall relationship between cards and designs better.

- *Development and testing of full games made with the Politics in Games framework*. Given the time constrains of the design workshop, the games created in them were not developed further than the concept papers. The next step in this process would thus be to further develop a game design made through the framework and the ideation cards to a playable prototype at least. These would then be tested with the player and any effects on the player, and the overall play experience and any differences to commercial or serious game observed.

- *Long-term studies on the effect of playing games with high levels of politics in them*. There are few long-term studies following players engaging with political games in the literature. Using the framework to analyse an existing commercial game and measuring participants' experience when playing these game on a long-term, lab-observed basis would give more detail into the effect individual game mechanics and aspects can have on a player's attitude, interest and engagement into politics.

- *Further iterations of the framework accounting for Ideology and worldviews in games and by the developers*. As mentioned before, future iterations of the framework should be able to alert users of the possibility that the designer or developer of the game could have build in a certain bias or worldview into the game. One way to do this would be through an additional module to the framework that only considers ideologies, worldviews and other biases present.

- *Link the framework to other game design methods*. There are many other, more general, approaches and methods to investigate game design in the literature, e.g. the Mechanics/Dynamics/Aesthetic (MDA) framework (Hunicke et al., 2004). Future work on the design of politically engaging games would investigate solutions for connecting the Politics in Games framework with other game design lenses in order to further ease and enable comparison between games as well as general structures in the design.

- *Further interdisciplinary research between computer science and political science.* Computer science and specifically human computer interaction and politics are two quite different subjects, however as this research has shown, they both bring different elements and approaches to a research project that can be mutually beneficial and allows for the investigation and development of novel approaches of thinking and working across both. Potential starting points to further explore how these two subjects can work alongside one another are areas where one can bring something

new to the other. These could for example be projects relating to how technology further influences (political) behaviour or how humans in greater societal structures and power hierarchies interact and what this might mean for technological requirements.

7.8. Final conclusion and thoughts

Politics, whether institutional or informal, is diverse and at times complex. The same is true for the variety and possibilities among (video) games. As such, it is not surprising that when the two are considered together, further complexity that is not always obvious to the player at the time of playing is created. Understanding these at time complex structures of politics, and the distribution and economy of resources and power in games, allows us to better appreciate games as a medium as well as a potential reflection of reality. Games can also remind us of the importance of politics and teach us more about this at times, confusing, but important matter.

Politics and political engagement, even on the most basic level through being informed or participating in elections, are fundamental for a working democracy. Who is to say that a playful engagement with politics is not possible or will not lead to an informed and engaged citizen? While it is obviously only one factor among many, this research is encouraging in the notion that playing with politics in the digital realm can also have positive effects on the real world. In a world that is seeing some of the basic tenets and values of democracy questioned and old ways of political engaging no longer being used, this is an encouraging outlook.

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Appendix

A. Landscaping study: questionnaire

Gaming experience

Page 1: Introduction

Welcome and thanks for being interested in my survey.

Are you playing games like *Civilization, Tropico, Galactic Civilizations, Democracy, Crusader King and/or Europa Universalis*? Are you interested in helping science by sharing your gaming experience, while also potentailly winning Amazon vouchers? Then please take part in my research.

This study is interested in players' experience and gaming habits of video games with varying degrees of political contexts. It is part of my PhD research with the Horizon CDT and Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham and should take only about 10 minutes to fill out.

As a token for my appreciation of your time taking part, there is prize draw for five Amazon vouchers for £20 each at the end of the questionnaire.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to stop the survey at any time. Any data recorded up to this point will be erased. Additionally, any data collected through this survey will be anonymised, used entirely only for academic purposes and will be stored on a password protected computer only accessible to the researcher.

Should you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to contact me:

Hanne Wagner (hanne.wagner (at) nottingham.ac.uk)
Horizon CDT
University of Nottingham
NG8 1BB

Before continuing, please confirm:

☐ I have read and understood the above description of the study and how my data will be stored and used

☐ I am currently or have previous played any of the above mentioned games

☐ I agree to take part in this study

☐ I confirm that I am above the age of 18

Page 2: Demographics

To start with I would like to know something about you

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other
- ○ Rather not say

What is your age?

- ○ 18 - 24
- ○ 25 - 34
- ○ 35 - 44
- ○ 45 - 54
- ○ 55 - 64
- ○ 65 and above

What is your nationality?

What is your current occupation?

- ○ employee
- ○ self-employed
- ○ in full-time education
- ○ carer (e.g. maternity leave)
- ○ unemployed

What is the highest degree of education you received?

- ○ Primary school
- ○ Secondary or Middle school (UK: GSCE)
- ○ High school (UK: A-level)
- ○ Vocational school
- ○ Undergraduate degree
- ○ Postgraduate degree

Page 3: Gaming

This section of the survey will focus on your playing style and general motivation for playing the games.

How often do you play each game? Please feel free to add an additional game of your choice as well.

	daily (more than 2 hours)	daily (less than 2 hours)	several time per week	weekly	monthly	A few time per year	once	never
Civilization series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tropico series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Galactic Civilizations series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Democracy series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Crusader King series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Europa Universalis series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (game of your choice)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

What is the title of your additional game choice?

[   ]

When playing any of the listed above games, what is your personal goal? (Tick any that apply to you)

☐ Achieving the goal provided by the game(s)
☐ Particular scores
☐ Completion
☐ Experimentation
☐ Domination
☐ Working out a strategy
☐ Survivial
☐ Winning
☐ Fun and enjoyment
☐ Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

How would you describe your own playing style?

What are your main motivations for playing the games in general? (Tick any that apply to you)

- ☐ It is fun
- ☐ Overall content
- ☐ Completion
- ☐ Experimentation
- ☐ Exploration
- ☐ I can play with others
- ☐ Competition
- ☐ Setting
- ☐ Story or characters
- ☐ Success
- ☐ Eventually 'mastering' the game and/or skills involved in it
- ☐ I can do whatever I want to do (within the game's limits)
- ☐ Overcoming challenges
- ☐ Immersion and presence felt
- ☐ The emotions provoked by the game
- ☐ I have nothing else to do
- ☐ Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

On scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very likely), how likely are also playing games in the following genres?

	0 - not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 - very likely
Action	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Adventure	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cardgames	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Fighting	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Horror	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
MOBA (Multiplaer Online Arena)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Music	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Puzzles	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Racing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
RPG	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Shooters	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Simulation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sports	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Strategy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Would you consider any of the the games you play 'political'?

○ Yes
○ No

If yes, could you please give some examples?

How accurate do you think "real-life" politics is depicted in the following games?

	0 - no relationship / resemblance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 - very realistic resemblance / relationship	Don't know
Civilization series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tropico series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Galactic Civilizations series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Democracy series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Crusader King series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Europa Universalis series	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other / above game of your choice	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page 4: Let's talk politics

The next section of the survey is on your personal interest and attiutde towards politics.

How interested in politics are you?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Have you been engaged into any of the following political activities in the last 12 months? (Tick any that apply to you)

- ☐ Voting in national elections
- ☐ Voting in local elections
- ☐ Signing a petition
- ☐ Contacting your local MP/representative
- ☐ Party membership
- ☐ Going to local council meetings
- ☐ Reading about current affairs (newspapers/online/other media outlets)
- ☐ Writing political comments on social media
- ☐ Sharing political content on social media
- ☐ Organizing any kind of Offline political activity
- ☐ Organising any kind of Online political activity
- ☐ Talking about political issues with friends or family members
- ☐ Attending a protest/demonstration
- ☐ Taking part in a consumer boycott
- ☐ Volunteering in local or national campaign
- ☐ Donation to a campaign or cause
- ☐ Running for or holding a public office
- ☐ Being active in a Student or Trade Union
- ☐ No, I do not follow any aspect of politics and am not engaged in any political activity
- ☐ Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

How much do you agree/disagree with the following questions?

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree	don't know
Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values	○	○	○	○	○	○
Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards	○	○	○	○	○	○
People in my country should be more tolerant of those who lead unconventional lives	○	○	○	○	○	○
The law should always be obeyed even if a particular law is wrong	○	○	○	○	○	○
People should be allowed to organize public meetings to protest against the government	○	○	○	○	○	○
Even political parties that wish to overthrow democracy should not be banned	○	○	○	○	○	○
A good society is one where all kinds of different opinions and ways of life can flourish	○	○	○	○	○	○

B.   ANOVA for individual games/political interest and engagement

Oneway

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pol_Int	No	57	7.9474	2.93027	.38812	7.1699	8.7249
	Yes	2089	7.8310	2.51045	.05493	7.7233	7.9387
	Total	2146	7.8341	2.52179	.05444	7.7274	7.9409
Q12_recode	No	57	.6667	.47559	.06299	.5405	.7929
	Yes	2089	.6242	.48444	.01060	.6034	.6450
	Total	2146	.6253	.48415	.01045	.6049	.6458
Pol_Engage	No	57	.9825	.13245	.01754	.9473	1.0176
	Yes	2089	.9593	.19762	.00432	.9508	.9678
	Total	2146	.9599	.19618	.00423	.9516	.9682
Pol_Engage_nonews	No	57	.4912	.50437	.06681	.3574	.6251
	Yes	2089	.5093	.50003	.01094	.4879	.5308
	Total	2146	.5089	.50004	.01079	.4877	.5300

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	No	1.00	11.00
	Yes	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Q12_recode	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	.751	1	.751	.118	.731
	Within Groups	13640.19	2144	6.362		
	Total	13640.94	2145			
Q12_recode	Between Groups	.100	1	.100	.426	.514
	Within Groups	502.681	2144	.234		
	Total	502.781	2145			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.030	1	.030	.772	.380
	Within Groups	82.524	2144	.038		
	Total	82.554	2145			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	.018	1	.018	.073	.787
	Within Groups	536.314	2144	.250		
	Total	536.332	2145			

Oneway

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound
Pol_Int	No	1305	7.6284	2.58635	.07159	7.4879	7.7688
	Yes	656	8.1890	2.38397	.09308	8.0063	8.3718
	Total	1961	7.8159	2.53371	.05722	7.7037	7.9281
Q12_recode	No	1305	.5962	.49085	.01359	.5695	.6228
	Yes	656	.6875	.46387	.01811	.6519	.7231
	Total	1961	.6267	.48380	.01093	.6053	.6481
Pol_Engage	No	1305	.9525	.21281	.00589	.9409	.9640
	Yes	656	.9771	.14959	.00584	.9657	.9886
	Total	1961	.9607	.19428	.00439	.9521	.9693
Pol_Engage_nonews	No	1305	.4904	.50010	.01384	.4633	.5176
	Yes	656	.5488	.49799	.01944	.5106	.5870
	Total	1961	.5099	.50003	.01129	.4878	.5321

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	No	1.00	11.00
	Yes	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Q12_recode	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	137.232	1	137.232	21.601	.000
	Within Groups	12445.31	1959	6.353		
	Total	12582.54	1960			
Q12_recode	Between Groups	3.641	1	3.641	15.674	.000
	Within Groups	455.118	1959	.232		
	Total	458.760	1960			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.265	1	.265	7.046	.008
	Within Groups	73.711	1959	.038		
	Total	73.977	1960			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	1.487	1	1.487	5.962	.015
	Within Groups	488.569	1959	.249		
	Total	490.056	1960			

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pol_Int	No	1679	7.8249	2.48410	.06062	7.7060	7.9438
	Yes	263	7.8593	2.78888	.17197	7.5207	8.1979
	Total	1942	7.8296	2.52678	.05734	7.7171	7.9420
Q12_recode	No	1679	.6254	.48417	.01182	.6022	.6485
	Yes	263	.6350	.48235	.02974	.5764	.6935
	Total	1942	.6267	.48381	.01098	.6051	.6482
Pol_Engage	No	1679	.9595	.19719	.00481	.9501	.9689
	Yes	263	.9620	.19162	.01182	.9387	.9852
	Total	1942	.9598	.19640	.00446	.9511	.9686
Pol_Engage_nonews	No	1679	.5045	.50013	.01221	.4805	.5284
	Yes	263	.5475	.49868	.03075	.4870	.6081
	Total	1942	.5103	.50002	.01135	.4880	.5326

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	No	1.00	11.00
	Yes	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Q12_recode	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	No	.00	1.00
	Yes	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	.269	1	.269	.042	.837
	Within Groups	12392.31	1940	6.388		
	Total	12392.58	1941			
Q12_recode	Between Groups	.021	1	.021	.090	.765
	Within Groups	454.317	1940	.234		
	Total	454.338	1941			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.001	1	.001	.036	.849
	Within Groups	74.866	1940	.039		
	Total	74.867	1941			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	.422	1	.422	1.687	.194
	Within Groups	484.872	1940	.250		
	Total	485.294	1941			

Oneway

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound
Pol_Int	.00	1556	7.6073	2.58528	.06554	7.4788	7.7359
	1.00	392	8.6939	2.09204	.10566	8.4861	8.9016
	Total	1948	7.8260	2.53116	.05735	7.7135	7.9384
Q12_recode	.00	1556	.5829	.49324	.01250	.5584	.6074
	1.00	392	.8163	.38771	.01958	.7778	.8548
	Total	1948	.6299	.48296	.01094	.6084	.6513
Pol_Engage	.00	1556	.9531	.21153	.00536	.9426	.9636
	1.00	392	.9872	.11236	.00568	.9761	.9984
	Total	1948	.9600	.19611	.00444	.9512	.9687
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	1556	.4936	.50012	.01268	.4687	.5184
	1.00	392	.5740	.49513	.02501	.5248	.6231
	Total	1948	.5098	.50003	.01133	.4875	.5320

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	.00	1.00	11.00
	1.00	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Q12_recode	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	369.664	1	369.664	59.430	.000
	Within Groups	12104.34	1946	6.220		
	Total	12474.01	1947			
Q12_recode	Between Groups	17.060	1	17.060	75.957	.000
	Within Groups	437.081	1946	.225		
	Total	454.141	1947			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.365	1	.365	9.543	.002
	Within Groups	74.511	1946	.038		
	Total	74.877	1947			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	2.024	1	2.024	8.126	.004
	Within Groups	484.790	1946	.249		
	Total	486.815	1947			

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pol_Int	.00	1222	7.6817	2.55892	.07320	7.5381	7.8253
	1.00	765	8.0614	2.47715	.08956	7.8856	8.2373
	Total	1987	7.8279	2.53387	.05684	7.7164	7.9394
Q12_recode	.00	1222	.5867	.49262	.01409	.5591	.6144
	1.00	765	.6941	.46108	.01667	.6614	.7268
	Total	1987	.6281	.48344	.01085	.6068	.6494
Pol_Engage	.00	1222	.9534	.21096	.00603	.9415	.9652
	1.00	765	.9712	.16724	.00605	.9594	.9831
	Total	1987	.9602	.19544	.00438	.9516	.9688
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	1222	.5033	.50019	.01431	.4752	.5313
	1.00	765	.5137	.50014	.01808	.4782	.5492
	Total	1987	.5073	.50007	.01122	.4853	.5293

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	.00	1.00	11.00
	1.00	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Q12_recode	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	67.854	1	67.854	10.619	.001
	Within Groups	12683.28	1985	6.390		
	Total	12751.14	1986			
Q12_recode	Between Groups	5.424	1	5.424	23.472	.000
	Within Groups	458.729	1985	.231		
	Total	464.153	1986			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.151	1	.151	3.946	.047
	Within Groups	75.709	1985	.038		
	Total	75.859	1986			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	.051	1	.051	.205	.650
	Within Groups	496.593	1985	.250		
	Total	496.644	1986			

Oneway

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound
Pol_Int	.00	1181	7.5546	2.61834	.07619	7.4051	7.7041
	1.00	805	8.2758	2.31767	.08169	8.1154	8.4361
	Total	1986	7.8469	2.52518	.05666	7.7358	7.9581
Q12_recode	.00	1181	.5868	.49262	.01433	.5587	.6149
	1.00	805	.6907	.46250	.01630	.6587	.7227
	Total	1986	.6289	.48322	.01084	.6076	.6502
Pol_Engage	.00	1181	.9500	.21795	.00634	.9376	.9625
	1.00	805	.9764	.15190	.00535	.9659	.9869
	Total	1986	.9607	.19430	.00436	.9522	.9693
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	1181	.4979	.50021	.01456	.4693	.5264
	1.00	805	.5304	.49938	.01760	.4959	.5650
	Total	1986	.5111	.50000	.01122	.4891	.5331

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	.00	1.00	11.00
	1.00	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Q12_recode	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	248.961	1	248.961	39.807	.000
	Within Groups	12408.50	1984	6.254		
	Total	12657.47	1985			
Q12_recode	Between Groups	5.167	1	5.167	22.366	.000
	Within Groups	458.334	1984	.231		
	Total	463.501	1985			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.333	1	.333	8.843	.003
	Within Groups	74.604	1984	.038		
	Total	74.937	1985			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	.507	1	.507	2.030	.154
	Within Groups	495.749	1984	.250		
	Total	496.256	1985			

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pol_Int	.00	695	7.7410	2.57548	.09769	7.5492	7.9328
	1.00	1329	7.8819	2.49585	.06846	7.7476	8.0162
	Total	2024	7.8335	2.52373	.05610	7.7235	7.9435
Q12_recode	.00	695	.5813	.49370	.01873	.5445	.6181
	1.00	1329	.6494	.47735	.01309	.6237	.6750
	Total	2024	.6260	.48399	.01076	.6049	.6471
Pol_Engage	.00	695	.9424	.23307	.00884	.9251	.9598
	1.00	1329	.9707	.16884	.00463	.9616	.9797
	Total	2024	.9610	.19372	.00431	.9525	.9694
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	695	.4921	.50030	.01898	.4548	.5293
	1.00	1329	.5199	.49979	.01371	.4930	.5468
	Total	2024	.5104	.50002	.01111	.4886	.5322

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	.00	1.00	11.00
	1.00	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Q12_recode	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	9.055	1	9.055	1.422	.233
	Within Groups	12875.83	2022	6.368		
	Total	12884.89	2023			
Q12_recode	Between Groups	2.114	1	2.114	9.062	.003
	Within Groups	471.759	2022	.233		
	Total	473.873	2023			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.363	1	.363	9.718	.002
	Within Groups	75.553	2022	.037		
	Total	75.917	2023			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	.354	1	.354	1.416	.234
	Within Groups	505.428	2022	.250		
	Total	505.782	2023			

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Oneway

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound
Pol_Int	.00	807	7.0384	2.64524	.09312	6.8556	7.2212
	1.00	1351	8.3153	2.32278	.06319	8.1914	8.4393
	Total	2158	7.8378	2.52454	.05434	7.7312	7.9444
Pol_Engage	.00	807	.9343	.24787	.00873	.9172	.9515
	1.00	1351	.9748	.15669	.00426	.9665	.9832
	Total	2158	.9597	.19674	.00424	.9514	.9680
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	807	.4783	.49984	.01760	.4438	.5129
	1.00	1351	.5263	.49949	.01359	.4996	.5529
	Total	2158	.5083	.50005	.01076	.4872	.5295

Descriptives

		Minimum	Maximum
Pol_Int	.00	1.00	11.00
	1.00	1.00	11.00
	Total	1.00	11.00
Pol_Engage	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00
Pol_Engage_nonews	.00	.00	1.00
	1.00	.00	1.00
	Total	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pol_Int	Between Groups	823.752	1	823.752	137.425	.000
	Within Groups	12923.48	2156	5.994		
	Total	13747.23	2157			
Pol_Engage	Between Groups	.829	1	.829	21.623	.000
	Within Groups	82.664	2156	.038		
	Total	83.493	2157			
Pol_Engage_nonews	Between Groups	1.162	1	1.162	4.656	.031
	Within Groups	538.188	2156	.250		
	Total	539.350	2157			

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Lower Bound
Plays Civ at least monthly	1.00	51	.9020	.30033	.04205	.8175
	2.00	36	1.0000	.00000	.00000	1.0000
	3.00	78	1.0000	.00000	.00000	1.0000
	4.00	106	.9717	.16662	.01618	.9396
	5.00	105	.9810	.13735	.01340	.9544
	6.00	166	.9759	.15381	.01194	.9523
	7.00	238	.9832	.12882	.00835	.9667
	8.00	360	.9750	.15634	.00824	.9588
	9.00	434	.9770	.15021	.00721	.9628
	10.00	234	.9658	.18210	.01190	.9424
	11.00	338	.9645	.18532	.01008	.9447
	Total	2146	.9734	.16083	.00347	.9666
Plays Tropico at least monthly	1.00	47	.2128	.41369	.06034	.0913
	2.00	35	.3143	.47101	.07961	.1525
	3.00	73	.2192	.41655	.04875	.1220
	4.00	96	.2188	.41557	.04241	.1345
	5.00	99	.3232	.47009	.04725	.2295
	6.00	149	.2953	.45772	.03750	.2212
	7.00	221	.3122	.46445	.03124	.2506
	8.00	329	.3374	.47354	.02611	.2860
	9.00	387	.3333	.47201	.02399	.2862
	10.00	219	.4155	.49394	.03338	.3497
	11.00	306	.3987	.49043	.02804	.3435
	Total	1961	.3345	.47194	.01066	.3136
Plays Galactic Civilizations at least monthyl	1.00	46	.2174	.41703	.06149	.0935
	2.00	34	.2647	.44781	.07680	.1085
	3.00	71	.1408	.35034	.04158	.0579
	4.00	95	.1053	.30852	.03165	.0424
	5.00	96	.0625	.24333	.02483	.0132
	6.00	150	.1867	.39095	.03192	.1236
	7.00	217	.0829	.27644	.01877	.0460
	8.00	323	.1084	.31132	.01732	.0743
	9.00	390	.1436	.35112	.01778	.1086
	10.00	215	.1395	.34731	.02369	.0928
	11.00	305	.1672	.37378	.02140	.1251
	Total	1942	.1354	.34227	.00777	.1202
Plays Democracy at least monthly	1.00	47	.0851	.28206	.04114	.0023
	2.00	34	.1176	.32703	.05609	.0035
	3.00	71	.0563	.23221	.02756	.0014
	4.00	95	.0842	.27918	.02864	.0273

Descriptives

		95% Confidence . .		
		Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Plays Civ at least monthly	1.00	.9864	.00	1.00
	2.00	1.0000	1.00	1.00
	3.00	1.0000	1.00	1.00
	4.00	1.0038	.00	1.00
	5.00	1.0075	.00	1.00
	6.00	.9995	.00	1.00
	7.00	.9996	.00	1.00
	8.00	.9912	.00	1.00
	9.00	.9911	.00	1.00
	10.00	.9893	.00	1.00
	11.00	.9843	.00	1.00
	Total	.9802	.00	1.00
Plays Tropico at least monthly	1.00	.3342	.00	1.00
	2.00	.4761	.00	1.00
	3.00	.3164	.00	1.00
	4.00	.3030	.00	1.00
	5.00	.4170	.00	1.00
	6.00	.3694	.00	1.00
	7.00	.3738	.00	1.00
	8.00	.3887	.00	1.00
	9.00	.3805	.00	1.00
	10.00	.4813	.00	1.00
	11.00	.4539	.00	1.00
	Total	.3554	.00	1.00
Plays Galactic Civilizations at least monthyl	1.00	.3412	.00	1.00
	2.00	.4210	.00	1.00
	3.00	.2238	.00	1.00
	4.00	.1681	.00	1.00
	5.00	.1118	.00	1.00
	6.00	.2497	.00	1.00
	7.00	.1199	.00	1.00
	8.00	.1424	.00	1.00
	9.00	.1785	.00	1.00
	10.00	.1862	.00	1.00
	11.00	.2093	.00	1.00
	Total	.1507	.00	1.00
Plays Democracy at least monthly	1.00	.1679	.00	1.00
	2.00	.2318	.00	1.00
	3.00	.1113	.00	1.00
	4.00	.1411	.00	1.00

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Lower Bound
	5.00	99	.0909	.28894	.02904	.0333
	6.00	148	.1419	.35012	.02878	.0850
	7.00	219	.1735	.37956	.02565	.1230
	8.00	323	.1796	.38442	.02139	.1375
	9.00	388	.2448	.43055	.02186	.2019
	10.00	219	.2968	.45790	.03094	.2358
	11.00	305	.2820	.45070	.02581	.2312
	Total	1948	.2012	.40102	.00909	.1834
Plays Crusader Kings at least monthly	1.00	48	.2917	.45934	.06630	.1583
	2.00	35	.3714	.49024	.08287	.2030
	3.00	74	.3784	.48829	.05676	.2653
	4.00	98	.2755	.44907	.04536	.1855
	5.00	97	.2990	.46018	.04672	.2062
	6.00	149	.4228	.49567	.04061	.3426
	7.00	221	.3846	.48761	.03280	.3200
	8.00	333	.3363	.47317	.02593	.2853
	9.00	401	.4065	.49179	.02456	.3582
	10.00	218	.3991	.49084	.03324	.3336
	11.00	313	.4601	.49920	.02822	.4045
	Total	1987	.3850	.48672	.01092	.3636
Plays Europa Universalis at least monthly	1.00	46	.1957	.40109	.05914	.0765
	2.00	35	.3429	.48159	.08140	.1774
	3.00	73	.3425	.47782	.05592	.2310
	4.00	96	.1979	.40052	.04088	.1168
	5.00	97	.2680	.44524	.04521	.1783
	6.00	151	.4305	.49679	.04043	.3506
	7.00	221	.3801	.48651	.03273	.3156
	8.00	329	.3921	.48896	.02696	.3391
	9.00	402	.4552	.49861	.02487	.4063
	10.00	219	.4201	.49470	.03343	.3542
	11.00	317	.5079	.50073	.02812	.4526
	Total	1986	.4053	.49108	.01102	.3837
Plays the game of one's choice atl least monthly	1.00	48	.5000	.50529	.07293	.3533
	2.00	34	.7059	.46250	.07932	.5445
	3.00	74	.7162	.45391	.05277	.6111
	4.00	101	.5644	.49831	.04958	.4660
	5.00	99	.7172	.45267	.04549	.6269
	6.00	153	.6405	.48142	.03892	.5636
	7.00	228	.6711	.47086	.03118	.6096
	8.00	339	.6637	.47314	.02570	.6132

Descriptives

| | | 95% Confidence . | . | |
		Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
	5.00	.1485	.00	1.00
	6.00	.1988	.00	1.00
	7.00	.2241	.00	1.00
	8.00	.2216	.00	1.00
	9.00	.2878	.00	1.00
	10.00	.3578	.00	1.00
	11.00	.3327	.00	1.00
	Total	.2191	.00	1.00
Plays Crusader Kings at least monthly	1.00	.4250	.00	1.00
	2.00	.5398	.00	1.00
	3.00	.4915	.00	1.00
	4.00	.3655	.00	1.00
	5.00	.3917	.00	1.00
	6.00	.5031	.00	1.00
	7.00	.4493	.00	1.00
	8.00	.3873	.00	1.00
	9.00	.4548	.00	1.00
	10.00	.4646	.00	1.00
	11.00	.5156	.00	1.00
	Total	.4064	.00	1.00
Plays Europa Universalis at least monthly	1.00	.3148	.00	1.00
	2.00	.5083	.00	1.00
	3.00	.4539	.00	1.00
	4.00	.2791	.00	1.00
	5.00	.3578	.00	1.00
	6.00	.5103	.00	1.00
	7.00	.4446	.00	1.00
	8.00	.4451	.00	1.00
	9.00	.5041	.00	1.00
	10.00	.4860	.00	1.00
	11.00	.5632	.00	1.00
	Total	.4269	.00	1.00
Plays the game of one's choice atl least monthly	1.00	.6467	.00	1.00
	2.00	.8673	.00	1.00
	3.00	.8214	.00	1.00
	4.00	.6627	.00	1.00
	5.00	.8075	.00	1.00
	6.00	.7174	.00	1.00
	7.00	.7325	.00	1.00
	8.00	.7143	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sig.
Plays Civ at least monthly	Between Groups	.095
	Within Groups	
	Total	
Plays Tropico at least monthly	Between Groups	.002
	Within Groups	
	Total	
Plays Galactic Civilizations at least monthyl	Between Groups	.004
	Within Groups	
	Total	
Plays Democracy at least monthly	Between Groups	.000
	Within Groups	
	Total	
Plays Crusader Kings at least monthly	Between Groups	.013
	Within Groups	
	Total	
Plays Europa Universalis at least monthly	Between Groups	.000
	Within Groups	
	Total	
Plays the game of one's choice atl least monthly	Between Groups	.085
	Within Groups	
	Total	

Descriptives

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Lower Bound
9.00	408	.6422	.47995	.02376	.5954
10.00	220	.6273	.48463	.03267	.5629
11.00	320	.7000	.45898	.02566	.6495
Total	2024	.6566	.47495	.01056	.6359

Descriptives

	95% Confidence Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
9.00	.6889	.00	1.00
10.00	.6917	.00	1.00
11.00	.7505	.00	1.00
Total	.6773	.00	1.00

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Plays Civ at least monthly	Between Groups	.418	10	.042	1.620
	Within Groups	55.068	2135	.026	
	Total	55.486	2145		
Plays Tropico at least monthly	Between Groups	6.021	10	.602	2.727
	Within Groups	430.532	1950	.221	
	Total	436.553	1960		
Plays Galactic Civilizations at least monthyl	Between Groups	3.042	10	.304	2.619
	Within Groups	224.340	1931	.116	
	Total	227.383	1941		
Plays Democracy at least monthly	Between Groups	10.435	10	1.044	6.678
	Within Groups	302.682	1937	.156	
	Total	313.117	1947		
Plays Crusader Kings at least monthly	Between Groups	5.314	10	.531	2.258
	Within Groups	465.159	1976	.235	
	Total	470.473	1986		
Plays Europa Universalis at least monthly	Between Groups	13.082	10	1.308	5.549
	Within Groups	465.621	1975	.236	
	Total	478.703	1985		
Plays the game of one's choice atl least monthly	Between Groups	3.727	10	.373	1.657
	Within Groups	452.625	2013	.225	
	Total	456.351	2023		

C. Framework survey questionnaire

Politics in Games

Page 1: Introduction

Hello and thank you for considering my study!

This survey investigates the use of politics in video games and is part of my ongoing PhD research at the University of Nottingham. The survey should not take more than 15 minutes to complete.

As a little thank you for spending time answering the survey, there is a prize draw for 2 x £50 Steam or Amazon vouchers at the end of it.

Any data collected through this survey will be anonymised, used only for academic purposes and will be stored on a password protected computer accessible only to the researcher. However, as no computer system is completely secure, it is always possible that a government or other third party may obtain a copy of your responses and link them back to you. The anonymised data may further be used for academic publications

Participation is of course voluntary and you are free to stop the survey at any time. Any data recorded up to this point will be deleted. Additionally, if you wish to withdraw your data from the study after having completed it, you can do so by contacting me through the details below. It will however not be possible to remove all (anonymised) copies of your data once any publication which uses it has been released.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me:

Hanne Wagner (hanne.wagner@nottingham.ac.uk)

Mixed Reality Lab
School of Computer Science
University of Nottingham
NG8 1BB

1. Before continuring, please confirm the following: ✱ *Required*

Please select at least 4 answer(s).
☐ I have read and understood the above description of the study and how my data will be stored and used
☐ I agree to take part in this study
☐ I am aware that I can withdraw my unpublished data from the study at any point
☐ I confirm that I am 18 years or older

Page 2: Formal game elements

For the purpose of this questionnaire, please choose one game to answer any video game related questions.

Please stick to this one title throughout the survey. Giving the nature of the questions, some familiarity with the game is advisable. Other than this, you can choose any game you would like to.

2. What is the game you are using for this survey?

[   ]

3. What is the game's genre? (choose any applicable)

☐ Action
☐ Adventure
☐ Fighting
☐ Massively Multiplayer
☐ Puzzle
☐ Racing
☐ RPG (role play game)
☐ Shooter
☐ Simulation
☐ Sports
☐ Strategy
☐ Other

3.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

[   ]

4. What would you say are the main game mechanics and forms of interaction? (choose any applicable)

☐ Resource management
☐ Combat
☐ Roleplay mechanics
☐ Player reputation
☐ Dialogue
☐ Puzzles
☐ Trade
☐ Survival
☐ Other

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4.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

5. What are the game's goals? (choose any applicable)

☐ (World-) Domination
☐ Survival
☐ Resource acquisition and growth
☐ Progress (towards a location or goal or storyline)
☐ To be the best or first
☐ Solve puzzles
☐ Simulate something
☐ Other

5.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

6. How are the game's goals achieved? Through.... (choose any applicable)

☐ Capture (of terrain or units)
☐ Chase (catch or flee an opponent)
☐ Race (be the first to reach a goal/finish line)
☐ Alignment (arranging pieces in a specific way)
☐ Rescue or Escape (getting someone into safety)
☐ Construction (of objects)
☐ Exploration
☐ (finding a) Solution (to something, a puzzle...)
☐ Outwitting an opponent (through knowledge)
☐ Other

6.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

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Page 3: Dramatic elements

7. What is the game's story and/or narrative? (choose any applicable)

☐ Adventure
☐ Mystery
☐ Revenge and/or redemption
☐ Calling (becoming a hero etc.)
☐ Unlikely or unforeseen events
☐ Being in charge of sth./sb. (a team, nation etc)
☐ Historical (re-enactment of historical events)
☐ No obvious narrative or story
☐ Other

7.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

8. What is the game's setting?

○ Present day
○ Historical setting
○ Fantasy
○ Science Fiction/Space
○ Alternative Universe
○ Other

8.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

9. What is the player's role in the game? Choose any applicabale, especially if the role(s) might change throughout the game.

☐ 'Hero' or heroic individual
☐ Leader
☐ Subordinate
☐ Newcomer
☐ Adversary
☐ Team mate
☐ Infiltrator
☐ Invader

☐ Neutral
☐ Other

9.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

```
[                    ]
[                    ]
```

10. Can the player influence the course of the game and its story?

○ Yes
○ No

10.a. If yes, how and to what extent?

```
[                    ]
[                    ]
```

11. Finally, in your own words, what would you say is the game about?

```
[                    ]
[                    ]
```

Page 4: Political elements

12. Is there any form of 'politics' in-game? (pick any relevant)

- ☐ (World-) Domination
- ☐ Government / institutional / party politics
- ☐ Military / armed conflict or warfare
- ☐ Diplomacy
- ☐ Resource distribution
- ☐ Economics
- ☐ Law or policy making
- ☐ Influencing of others (including negotiations, bribery or by other means)
- ☐ Power struggles
- ☐ Espionage
- ☐ Ideology, values or beliefs
- ☐ Informal politics (e.g. not in institutional context, among social circles etc.)
- ☐ Other

12.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

13. In what part of the game are 'politics' implemted?

- ○ Game mechanics
- ○ Narrative / Story
- ○ Both
- ○ Other

13.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

14. Can the player influence any of the above political elements?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

15. Does the player hold any kind of political position or role in-game?

○ Yes
○ No

16. On a scale from 0 to 10, how realistic do you think 'politics' are portrayed in-game?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select exactly 1 answer(s).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not very realistic at all	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	Very realistic

17. Is there any other aspect of politics in the game that is not covered by any of the above questions? E.g. has the game some sort of underlying value-set or ideology, a particular 'messege' or something similar?

Page 5: Now something about you

Finally, in order to gain a better understanding of this survey's participants, we would like to know a little bit about you.

18. What gender do you identify with?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Rather not say
- ○ Other

18.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

[   ]

19. What is your age?

Please enter a whole number (integer).

[   ]

20. In what country do you live? ✳ *Required*

Please enter a response that only contains letters.

[   ]

21. Do you hold an university/college degree?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I am currently a student
- ○ Rather not say

22. How often do you play video games?

- ○ Daily
- ○ Several times per week
- ○ Weekly
- ○ Once every few weeks
- ○ Monthly
- ○ Once every few months

- Once a year
- I used to play in the past, but no longer play
- I have never played video games

One's interest in politics might potentially influence their perception of politics in video games. Therefore the following questions are about your engagement and opinion on politics. However, in case you feel uncomfortable about answering these, please feel free not to answer them.

23. How interested in politics are you on a scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Very much)? *Optional*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I am not interested in politics at all	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	I am very much interested in politcs

24. How much would you say that the political system in your country allows people like you to have an influence on politics? *Optional*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	Completely

25. How much would you say that politicians care what people like you think? *Optional*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	Completely / They do care a lot

26. Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last national election in your country? ∗ *Required*

- Yes
- No
- Was not eligible to vote
- Rather not say

D. List of games analysed by participants

Total answers:136   Individual games:95

Title	How often was the game used?
Skyrim	9
Civilization V	7
The Witcher 3	5
Fallout 4	3
Fallout: New Vegas	3
Mass Effect	3
Life is strange	3
The Sims	3
World of Warcraft	3
Age of Mythology	2
Bioshock	2
Civilization IV	2
Dota 2	2
Half Life 2	2
Mass Effect 3	2
Overwatch	2
Smite	2
Stardew Valley	2
The Witness	2
Alien: Isolation	1
Alpha Centauri (Firaxis, 1999)	1
batman arkham	1
Binding of Isaac Rebirth	1
Borderlands 2	1
Cities:skylines	1
Civilization	1
Command and Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	1
Company of Heroes	1
Crusader Kings 2	1
Dark Souls	1
Deus Ex: Human Revoution	1
Diablo 3	1
Dishonored	1
Divinity: Dragon Commander	1
DOMINATIONS	1
Doom 4	1
Dragon Age	1
Dragon Age Inquisition	1
Enter the Gungeon	1
ESO	1
Europa Universalis	1
Final Fantasy IX	1
Final Fantasy VII	1
Fire Emblem Fates	1
Fire Emblem: Blazing Sword	1
GTA5	1

Guild Wars	1
Guild Wars 2	1
League of legends	1
Lego Star Ward	1
Link's Awakening	1
Lord of the Rings Online	1
Mario Kart: Double Dash	1
Mass Effect 2	1
Master of Orion II	1
Mega Man X	1
Metal Gear Solid V	1
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	1
Path of Exile	1
Pinball FX 2	1
Pokemon	1
Pokemon (not Go)	1
Pokemon Go	1
Pokemon Platinum	1
Pokemon Ruby Version	1
Pokémon: Red Version	1
Portal 2	1
Professor Layton series	1
RocketLeague	1
Runescape	1
Shadowrun dragonfall	1
Sim City	1
Sim City 2000	1
Spore	1
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	1
Starcraft series	1
Stellaris	1
Street Fighter 4	1
Super Mario Sunshine	1
Supremacy 1914	1
SWAT 4	1
Tales of Graces f	1
Tales of Maj'Eyal	1
Team Fortress 2	1
The 7th Guest	1
The Last Of Us	1
The legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	1
The Sims 4	1
The Stanley Parable	1
The Talos Principle	1
Tom Clancy's The Division	1
Torchlight 2	1
Transport Tycoon Deluxe	1
Verdun	1
Warcraft 3	1
Wolfenstein The New Order	1

E. Overview on research activities and outputs

Social science and psychology methods

Design perspective and methods

Different iterations on how to represent the framework visually [spider diagram, quadrants...]

'survey' version of framework

Initial Literature Review

Landscaping study

Framework v.1

Framework v.2

Ideation cards

Game Design Workshop

Initial 'expert' case studies

Online / 'non-expert' analysis study

Updated 'expert' case studies

Study

Theoretical and conceptual work

Design tool