



POLITICAL STUDIES SEMINARS

Seminar

Party responsiveness to public opinion in a multi-dimensional policy space

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Party responsiveness to public opinion is a key question in the study of democratic representation. While numerous studies have examined party responsiveness on the broad ideological dimensions, there is less comparative research on when and how parties respond to public opinion on more specific issue dimensions. We aim to address this research gap by studying party positional responsiveness on seven issue dimensions. We conceptualise party responsiveness as parties adjusting their positions to eliminate previous incongruence between themselves and the central point in the voter preference distribution. This enables us to examine not only whether parties are responsive to public opinion, but also how much party responsiveness contributes to party-voter congruence. Building on theories about social cleavages and party competition, we develop and test hypotheses on how patterns of responsiveness vary across issues depending on whether they are of core or secondary relevance for party's ideological identity. Our empirical analysis combines the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys and the European Social Survey and European Election Study from 14 Western European countries. We find that parties respond to their supporters on both core and secondary issues. We argue that policy-seeking and vote-seeking motivations drive parties' responsiveness, but policy-seeking is more important for core issues while the pursuit of votes is more relevant in relation to secondary issues. We also show that responsiveness to party supporters is generally compatible with parties responding to the broader electorate.

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