

Electoral Mandates and Responsiveness: Comparing Government Reactions to Public Opinion in 'Normal' and 'Unexpected' Policy Junctures

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MOTIVATION, GOALS & QUESTIONS

- Motivation:
 - Normative disagreement about whether governments *ought* to respond to the public's demands between elections.
 - The role of mandates (and their role for accountability) is critical in this discussion.
- Two views (cf. Mansbridge & Rehfeld):
 - Promissory view/form of representation: Elections confer mandates based on electoral platforms and governments are legitimized to 'resist' the pressures of the public between elections
 - Anticipatory view/form of representation: Elections provide incentives for governments to engage in deliberative dynamics and switch policies between elections, thus it is 'natural' to expect responsiveness between elections.

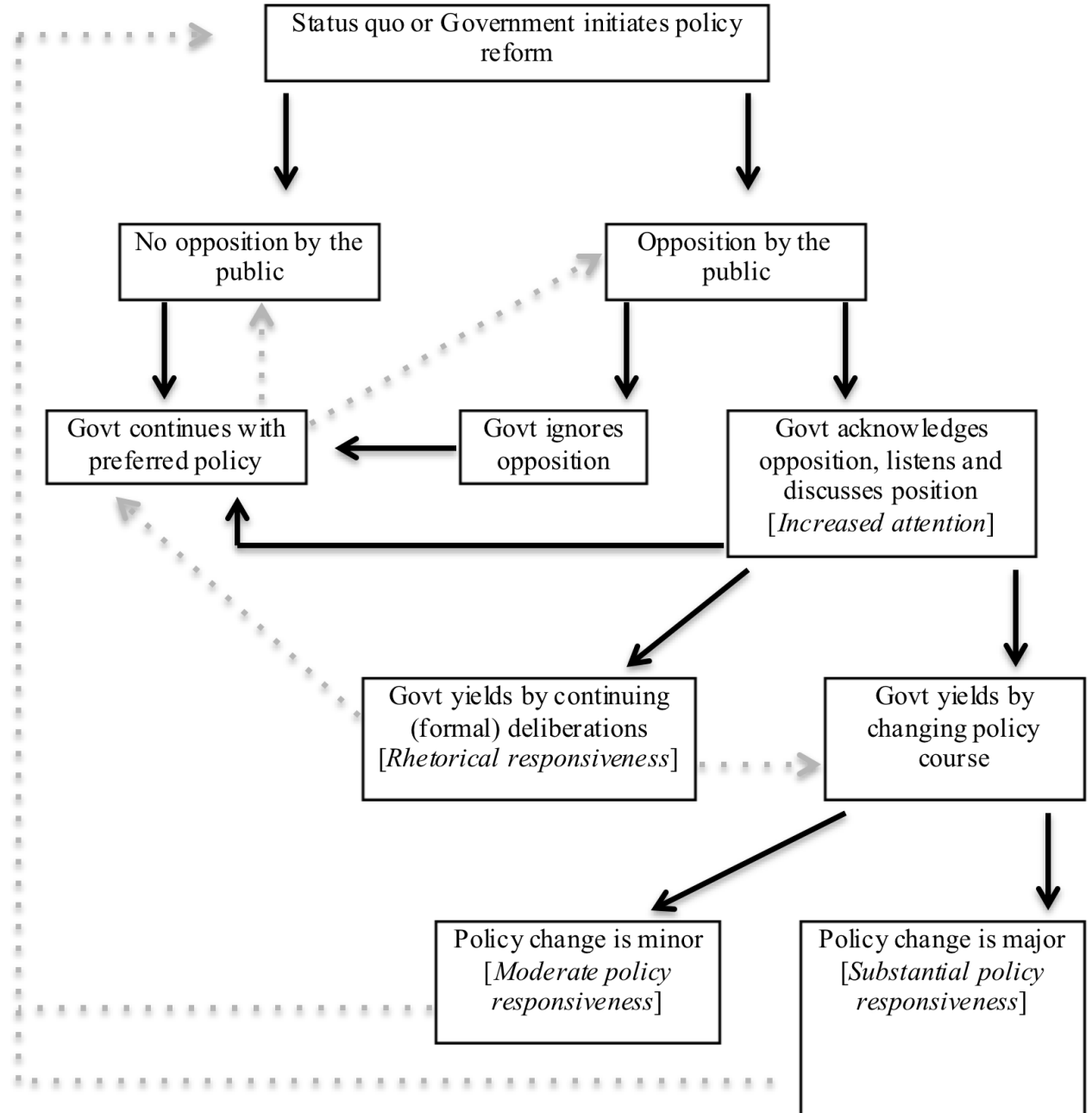
MOTIVATIONS, GOALS & QUESTIONS (Cont.)

- Normative debate focuses considerably on role of elections, pledges and electoral mandates.
- But very little empirical work on whether electoral mandates matter for responsive behaviour.
- The comparison of non-mandated or ‘unexpected’ situations/external shocks with ‘normal’ policy making situations as potentially interesting, from both normative and empirical perspectives.
- Goal of the paper: A first empirical take at the different dynamics of responsiveness in ‘mandated’ and ‘non-mandated’ situations.
- Main question addressed: Are governments less likely to respond to the pressures of the public when claiming a mandate is less straightforward?

What counts as responsiveness?

- In a different paper I argue that...
- There are multiple forms in which governments can respond to the policy demands of citizens.
- That rhetorical reactions also matter (as argued by deliberative theorists) but are just a 'minimalist' stage in the responsiveness process.
- A 'processual' notion of democratic responsiveness might be useful: responsiveness viewed as a series of steps or stages

Figure 1. Democratic (governmental) responsiveness as a process



- Following this processual understanding of responsiveness...
- Ordinal conceptualization of responsiveness proposed:
 0. No reaction, no change in attention or in position.
 1. Increased attention to the issue by the Government but no change in position.
 2. Rhetorical reaction/change: increased attention to the issue and some symbolic yielding to opposing actors without substantive change in policy.
 3. Moderate policy reaction/change: substantive change in a (relatively) minor aspect of the policy.
 4. Substantial policy reaction/change: in the case of major policy changes, u-turns in relation to initial policy positions or proposals, or when major legislation is enacted.

Other relevant conceptual issues

- What do we mean by public opinion?
 - Opinions expressed in surveys: survey information imperfect in many contexts, but how do govts get their cues from the public?
 - Collective action: visible vs ‘concealed’ action (e.g. lobby action). How to approach the latter?
- How do we measure citizens’ preferences and demands?
 - Information imperfect: we have chosen to measure what is in public domain only.

ASSUMPTIONS & EXPECTATIONS

- Assumptions:
 - On most policies, governments have ‘preferred policy’ option
 - In absence of opposition, this is the policy course they would follow
 - Governmental actors are ‘anticipators’ who need to balance vote maximization, policy seeking and office seeking goals.
- Expectations on governmental responsiveness
 - Absence of protest → little incentive for responsiveness between elections, regardless of position of ‘median’ voter (H1)
 - If protest substantial and consistent with ‘median’ voter → substantial responsiveness much more likely. (H2)
 - If protest substantial but inconsistent with ‘median’ voter → reaction conditional on single vs. coalition govt, and if protesters in line with ‘core’ voters (of any govt party). (H3)
 - Above expectations conditional on how close election day is. (H4)
- ‘Unexpected’ vs ‘normal’ policy-making situations:
responsiveness more likely in ‘unexpected’ junctures. (H5)

Research Design

Policy 'Junctures' as the Focus of Analysis

- Innovative approach to the subject by not looking at continuous aggregate-level time series.
- Instead, focusing on policy 'junctures', as moments of policy formulation, reform or decision-making.
- Process-tracing approach relying on event-history logic.
- 'Normal' vs 'non-mandated' junctures compared.

Policy ‘Junctures’ as the Focus of Analysis

Table 1. Classification of policy cases to study

Policy area	Unexpected situations	“Normal” situations
<i>Industry & Environment-related policies</i>	1. Nuclear energy after Fukushima (pilot) [Shock = Fukushima]	3. Regulations on genetically modified crops (GMCs)
<i>Economy-related reforms: productive sectors</i>	4. Mortgage laws regulations after 2008 crisis [Shock = banking crisis/recession]	2. Intellectual property and internet reforms (pilot)
<i>Welfare/social reform policies</i>	7. Pensions reform after 2008 crisis [Shock = banking crisis/recession] 11. Immigration reform after unexpected immigration/asylum seekers crisis [Shock = country-specific]	8. Pensions reforms pre-2008 crisis (and post-1996) 10. University fees reforms
<i>Moral policies</i>	(No unexpected cases found)	9. Same-sex marriage reforms
<i>Foreign affairs policy</i>	5. Participation in Afghanistan war [Shock = 9/11]	6. Participation in Iraq war/invasion (2003)

Note: The numbers rank-order temporal precedence in the data collection process. The lighter type font indicates case studies for which we might run out of time given delays in coding.

Research Design

Case selection, data & methods

- Eventually, data on 8-11 policy junctures (12-23 countries per policy juncture)
- At present, data available for 2 policy junctures: nuclear energy policy after Fukushima (non-mandated / shock case) & intellectual property and internet reforms (mandated / normal case) [Pilot case studies]
- Own manual coding of:
 - All claims made by different actors as covered by the national press agency newswires.
 - All relevant survey reports measuring public opinion during the coding time periods.
 - Newspaper editorials for 2 newspapers in each country.
 - Parliamentary questions and legislation databases
- Unit of coding and analysis:
 - An “event” = claim, statement, action, survey result;
 - An “actor” (up to 3 actors coded per “event”).
 - Use of comprehensive dictionary of keywords to track all relevant events

The nuclear energy policy after Fukushima study

- Policy juncture starts with the date of the 'shock' (March 11, 2011)
- From this date all 'events' relating to nuclear energy policy are tracked and coded
- Coding continues until:
 - The govt changes substantially policy position (substantial policy responsiveness), or
 - Elections take place 6 months or later from shock date, or
 - The date of March 30, 2011 is reached
- Data collected for 13 cases for this study
- Cases with & without nuclear energy, but at least a debate, included

Table 1. Criteria and classification for case selection

		Debate prior to Fukushima	
		YES	NO
Nuclear energy prior to Fukushima	YES	(1) Belgium Germany Spain Switzerland	(2) Canada Finland France Netherlands Sweden United Kingdom United States
	NO	(3) Australia Italy	(4) Austria Cyprus Denmark Greece Ireland Iceland New Zealand Malta Norway Portugal

Sources: Kriesi (2013); Aarts and Arentsen (2013); Swyngedouw (2013); Bern and Winkel (2013); Country reports of the World Nuclear Association; ReponsiveGov data collection.

The intellectual property and internet reforms study

- Policy juncture starts with:
 - An electoral pledge to reform intellectual property regulations to protect from copyright infringements on the internet, or
 - An announcement of intention to introduce a reform in coalition or any other government statement
- From this date all ‘events’ relating to this policy area are tracked and coded
- Coding continues until resolution is given to pledge/commitment:
 - The govt changes substantially policy position (substantial policy responsiveness), or
 - Reform is approved or implemented, or
 - Govt is removed from office or substantial change in coalition happens
- Data collection completed for 6 countries, and 8 cases only
- Eventually data for 21 countries, and probably around 40-50 junctures in total

Cases that will be included in Copyright and internet study

Country	Number of policy junctures	Completed
Australia	2	0
Austria	Pending	0
Belgium	Pending	0
Canada	Pending	0
Cyprus	2	0
Denmark	3	0
Finland	Pending	0
France	3	3
Germany	3	1
Greece	1	0
Iceland	1	0
Ireland	Pending	0
Italy	Pending	0
Netherlands	Pending	0
Norway	2	2
Portugal	3	0
Spain	Pending	0
Sweden	3	1
Switzerland	Pending	0
UK	4	1
US	Pending	0

Figure 3. Evolution of pro- and anti-government events in the first 6 months, per country and week

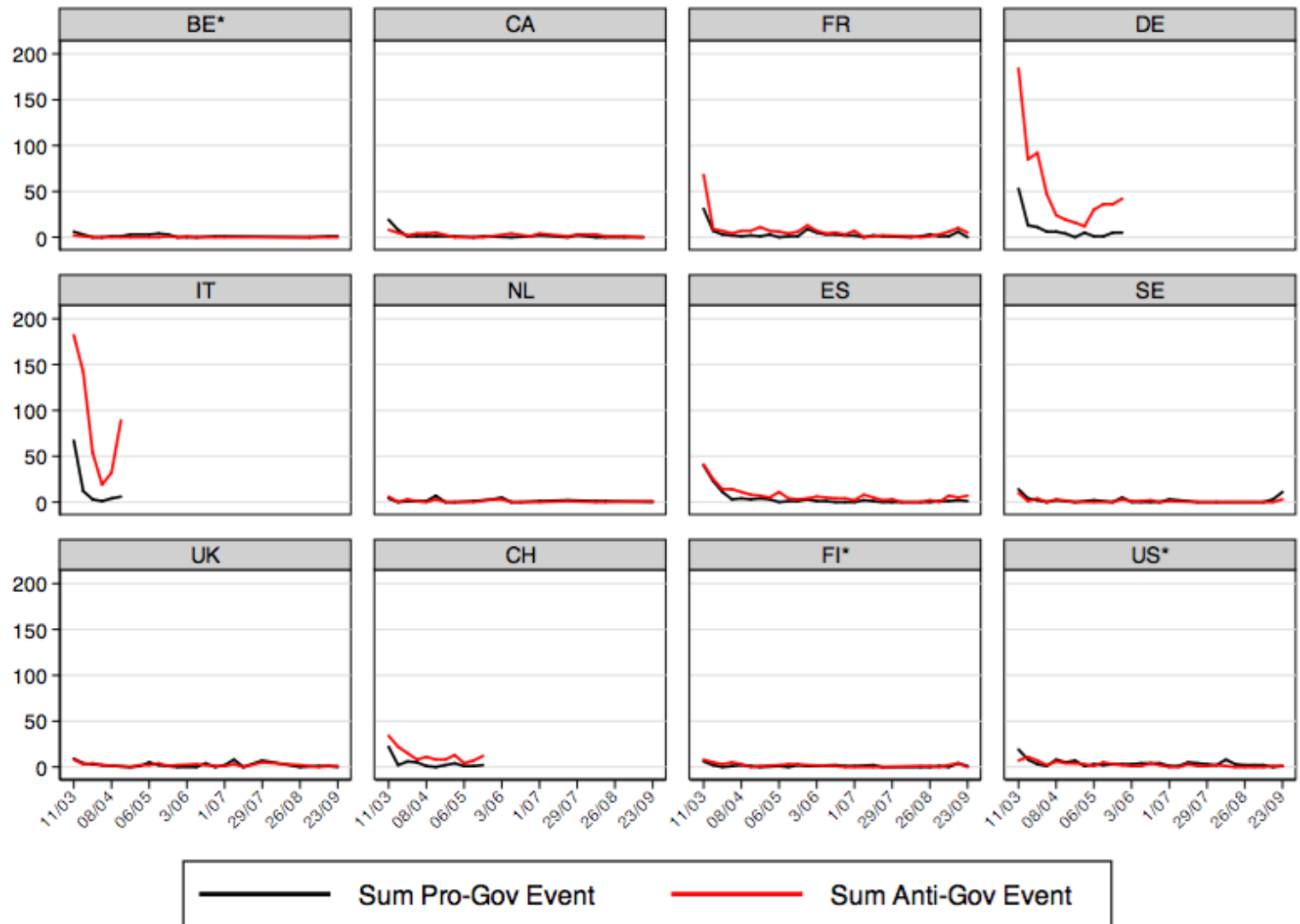
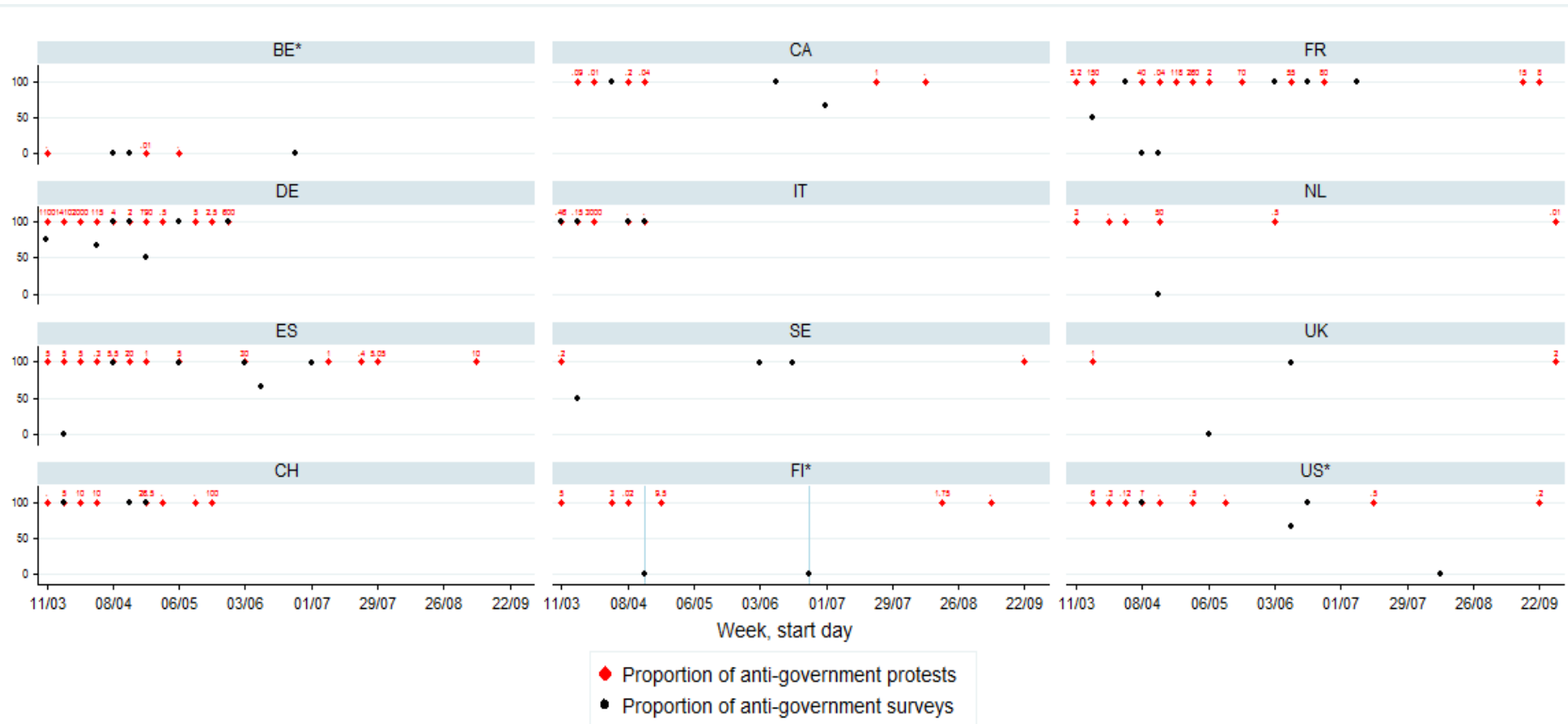


Figure 4. Nuclear energy policy position of protesters and general public during the first 6 months, per country and week



Preliminary findings

Protest	Consistency vocal & median voter	Case	Outcome
Intense	Yes	<i>IT-nuclear</i> <i>DE-nuclear</i> <i>CH-nuclear</i>	Substantial policy responsiveness (4) Substantial policy responsiveness (4) Substantial policy responsiveness (4)
	No		
	Fluctuating/ unclear		
Moderate	Yes	<i>FR-internet2</i> <i>SE-internet1</i>	Increased attention to the issue (1) Rhetorical responsiveness (2)
	No	<i>FI-nuclear</i>	FI1 Kiviniemi govt: Increased attention to the issue (1) FI2 Katainen govt: No reaction (0) [but initial position moderated during coalition negotiations]
	Fluctuating/ unclear	<i>ES-nuclear</i> <i>FR-nuclear</i> <i>DE-internet1</i>	Rhetorical responsiveness (2) Rhetorical responsiveness (2) Increased attention to the issue (1)
Small/ Negligible	Yes	<i>BE-nuclear</i>	BE1: Increased attention to the issue (1) BE2: Substantial policy change but counter-responsive move
		<i>SE-nuclear</i> <i>FR-internet1</i> <i>FR-internet3</i>	Increased attention to the issue (1) Rhetorical responsiveness (2) Increased attention to the issue (1)
		<i>UK-nuclear</i> <i>NL-nuclear</i> <i>UK-internet3</i>	Increased attention to the issue (1) Increased attention to the issue (1) Moderate policy responsiveness (3) [to industry]
	Fluctuating/ unclear	<i>CA-nuclear</i> <i>US-nuclear</i> <i>NO-internet1</i> <i>NO-internet2</i>	No reaction (0) Increased attention to the issue (1) Increased attention to the issue (1) No reaction (0)

In Italics, countries with elections during period coded.

Preliminary conclusions

- Effect of protests (H1): moderate/small protests in most cases and govts almost never changed position; large in CH, DE & IT and govt changed. [consistent with expectations]
- Effects depending on consistency with surveys (H2 & H3): in CH, IT & DE, overwhelmingly consistent and govt changed course. [in line with expectations]
- Effects dependent on closeness to elections (H4): mixed findings: IT case consistent with expectations (close elections and few constraints), but CH & DE only consistent with expectations for closeness to elections. Effect conditional on protest?
- Effect of shocks / lack of mandate (H5): substantial responsiveness seems more likely [consistent with expectations]

These are preliminary and rest of cases needed for robust conclusions. More to follow soon!

Project website with papers, data codebooks
and intermediate findings:

<http://www.responsivegov.eu>

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