

A CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACH TO GOVERNMENTAL POLICY RESPONSIVENESS BETWEEN ELECTIONS

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Outline of the paper & the presentation

- Introduction: motivations, goals and questions
- What is responsiveness?
- When ought governments to be responsive between elections? The normative debate
- When are governments likely to be responsive between elections? The empirical debate
- Conclusions: expectations for future research

MOTIVATIONS, GOALS & QUESTIONS

- Motivation: Vast and increasing empirical scholarship on governmental responsiveness, but less conceptual & theoretical elaboration on what responsiveness is.
- Goal of the paper: To provide a conceptual and theoretical framework to the study of governmental policy responsiveness between elections.
- Main research questions:
 - How often should we expect representative governments to respond to the public's wishes and in which circumstances
 - Who is the 'public' or the represented that governments should respond to?
 - What is the (normative) relation between the existence of electoral mandates and pledges and the expectation of governmental responsiveness?
 - Regardless of when governments ought to be responsive, when are they likely to be responsive?

What is responsiveness?

- Pitkin: Representation is acting in the interested of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.
- Rarely discussed what exactly is meant by responsiveness.
- Powell: Responsiveness is ‘what occurs when the democratic process induces the government to form and implement policies that the citizens want’.
- Responsiveness and congruence often used interchangeably.

What is responsiveness? (cont.)

- Problematic because congruence can be due to:
 - Constituents choosing representatives who match their preferences; or
 - Representatives not sharing preferences but constrained by other factors to follow policies consistent with constituents; or
 - Representatives persuading constituents to share their preferences; or
 - Representatives adapting policy behaviour to views of constituents.
- I argue only the latter should be called ‘responsiveness’.

What is responsiveness? (cont.)

- Responsiveness requires:
 - That views or preferences over issue differ between constituents and representative; and
 - That representatives adapt or change their position to reflect the diverging view/preference of constituents.
- Assumption: in most cases, representative holds an opinion and has a preferred policy, and responsiveness requires change.
- When representative does not have a firm preferred policy, responsiveness requires adopting preferred policy of constituents.

What is responsiveness? (cont.)

- How can we measure governmental responsiveness?
- Multiple forms in which governments can respond to policy demands of citizens.
- Ordinal conceptualization of responsiveness proposed:
 0. No reaction, no change in attention or in position.
 1. Increased attention to the issue by the GOVT 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.

WHEN OUGHT GOVERNMENTS TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE PUBLIC OPINION? NORMATIVE ISSUES

- Three problems for normative (and empirical analysis):
 - Mandate vs independence: unresolved issue of how much responsiveness between elections is desirable
 - Diversity of constituents' views: there is no single 'principal', heterogeneity of preferences, to whom should representatives pay attention?
 - How to learn about their views: surveys do not solve all problems, preferences expressed through multiple 'voices', how to weight each?
- Normative debate focuses considerably on electoral mandates.
- Non-mandated or 'unexpected' situations/external shocks as especially interesting ones, from both normative and empirical perspectives.

WHEN WILL GOVERNMENTS BE RESPONSIVE TO THE PUBLIC OPINION? EMPIRICAL ISSUES

- When are governments *likely* to be responsive?
- Govts have a preferred policy in most cases: under what conditions will they change course?
- Govts as ‘anticipators’: reaction contingent; relevant factors = saliency of issue, size of potential electoral loss, closeness to elections.
- But Govts also constrained: policy-making process related, external constraints (reputation, contracts), internal party/coalition constraints.

CONCLUSIONS & EXPECTATIONS

- ‘Unexpected’ vs ‘normal’ policy-making situations: responsiveness more likely in ‘unexpected’ junctures.
- Behavioural expectations on govtal responsiveness
 - Absence of protest → no incentive for responsiveness
 - If substantial protest but inconsistent with ‘median’ voter → reaction conditional on single vs coalition govt, and if protesters in line with ‘core’ voters (of any govt party).
 - If substantial protest consistent with ‘median’ voter → responsive much more likely.
 - Above expectations conditional on how close election day is.
 - Also, conditional on external and internal constraints.

Project website with papers, data
codebooks and intermediate
findings:

<http://www.responsivegov.eu>

THANK YOU!