

Do Partisan Ends Justify the Procedural Means? How Voters Evaluate the Legislative Performance of Executives

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Abstract: Existing scholarship disagrees to what extent voters hold executives accountable for their legislative performance, and attempts to adjudicate between theoretical perspectives face difficult empirical obstacles. Through a series of survey experiments embedded in a French national election study with more than 15,000 respondents, we examine the effects of party, policy and democratic process on how voters assess the performance of prime ministers. In contrast to the common view in the literature that partisan ends justify the procedural means, we find that prime ministers are punished for the use of procedural force in policymaking, even by co-partisans and those who agree with the policy proposal. However, prime ministers that do not deliver voters' preferred policy are punished even more. These results suggest that evaluations reflect a trade-off between competing goals, rather than being overwhelmed by partisan or policy considerations. They also help explain the hard choices made by prime ministers.