Second-Order Elections and Issue Attention in Parliament: The Timing of State-Level Elections and their Influence on National Party Agendas

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Abstract

Although research on party behavior between elections has grown, we lack a full picture of how legislative cycle events shape party strategies. One such event is second-order elections and their impact on national politics. Research shows consistent voter patterns: turnout is lower, small or new parties gain support, and governing parties usually lose ground, following a cyclical rhythm. We extend this perspective to party behavior, asking how these dynamics influence national party rhetoric. We theorize that as state elections near, parties emphasize state-salient issues to show responsiveness and support regional branches. This effect also depends on election competitiveness and timing. We further hypothesize that differences in issue emphasis between coalition and opposition parties increase at the mid-point of the national electoral cycle, as coalitions defend their record while opposition parties exploit voter discontent to push alternative agendas. To test this, we analyze Bundestag speeches from 1991 to 2021. Germany provides an ideal case, as its federal structure and frequent state elections link national and regional party dynamics. The findings contribute to research on issue attention, parliamentary party behavior, and electoral cycles.

Women’s Leadership and the Expansion of Populist Right Party Agendas

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Abstract

How do women leaders shape the agendas of populist radical right (PRR) parties, and how does this in turn impact the party’s electoral appeal? Historically male-dominated PRR parties are now increasingly led by women. Yet, research has not systematically examined how women-led PRR parties recalibrate party priorities and positions, or what influence this has on perceptions of the party. To shed light on these questions, we combine observational and experimental evidence. In the first, exploratory, stage we describe key differences between men- and women-led PRR parties using manifesto data from 15 Western European countries from 1988 to 2025. We find that women-led PRR parties expand the breadth of their issue agendas, but do so primarily through valence topics, such as technology, infrastructure, cultural policy, and national solidarity. We further observe selective positional shifts, moving leftward on labor policy and rightward on defense-related issues. These findings suggest an overall expansion of issues, with a particular focus on protection. In the second stage, we test the effects of these appeals through a survey experiment manipulating leader gender and issue emphasis. We expect that broader messages will reduce the party’s perceived extremity and enhance favourability compared to messages focused primarily on immigration, particularly for female leaders, without eroding the party’s ownership of the immigration issue. The findings offer new insights into how women leaders can reshape party positioning both within and beyond traditionally “feminine” issues.

The Patterns of Political Access: Candidacy, Placement, and Success of Visible Minorities in Germany

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Abstract

Visible minorities are significantly underrepresented in German politics. The 21st Bundestag includes only 73 MPs with a migration background (11.6 per cent), whereas this group constitutes nearly 30 percent of the overall population. These numbers are expected to rise in the near future, following recent reforms making citizenship more accessible to immigrants. While the descriptive deficit is well-documented, the mechanisms, patterns and strategic considerations that produce these outcomes remain underexamined, particularly within the mixed-member proportional (MMP) system. Hence, this project addresses the central puzzle: "When and why do political parties nominate minority candidates in district-level races?"

Pack-Crack-Pack: Gerrymandering with Differential Turnout

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Abstract

This paper studies the manipulation of electoral maps by political parties, commonly referred to as gerrymandering. At the core of our analysis is the recognition that not all inhabitants of a district vote. This is important for gerrymandering as districts must have the same population size, but only active voters matter for electoral outcomes. We propose a model of gerrymandering that allows for heterogeneity in turnout across individuals. This model reveals a new strategy for the gerrymanderers: the pattern is to pack-crack-pack along the turnout dimension. Specifically, parties benefit from packing low-turnout supporters and high-turnout opponents, while creating cracked districts that combine moderate-to-high-turnout supporters with lower-turnout opponents. These findings yield testable empirical implications about the relationship between partisan support, turnout rates, and electoral maps. Using a novel empirical strategy based on comparing maps proposed by Democrats and Republicans during the 2020 U.S. redistricting cycle, we test these predictions and find supporting evidence.

Empirical Self-Dealing in Constitution-Making — Empirical Evidence from 1789 to 2024

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Abstract

This study revisits the institutional self-dealing hypothesis, which posits that constitution-makers from the executive or parliament choose constitutional provisions that disproportionately benefit their branch of government. As a result, specially elected assemblies are expected to produce better and more successful constitutions. Previous analyses suffered from limited sample size and methodological constraints. Addressing these gaps, this paper analyzes novel data on all 711 constitution-making processes in independent states between 1789 and 2024, thereby significantly expanding the scope of analysis. Three results stand out. First, institutional self-dealing is measurable. Second, constituent assemblies and constituent legislatures seem to share the common goal of constraining the executive. Third, constitutions drafted by constituent assemblies are not systematically more successful. They tend to be better enforced in the long run, but have no higher life expectancy in general. We refrain from causal claims, but the patterns are stable across specifications and measurement choices. The upshot is straightforward: who drafts matters for the balancing of de jure powers, and common claims about the general superiority of constituent assemblies should be tempered.

Acceptance of Getting Transfers and Evading Taxes by Fraud or Loophole Exploitation

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Abstract

This experimental study examines attitudes toward deception and exploitation of loopholes both in a social welfare and in a tax regime. Specifically, it investigates whether benefiting from loopholes is judged differently from straightforward fraudulent acts, and how these judgments differ between social welfare and tax regimes. In our online experiment, participants engage in a simulated “ingot market” and get an opportunity to receive additional payments modeled either on a social welfare or a tax regime. They may attempt to increase their earnings through deception or clever exploitation of a loophole. These actions are observed by impartial spectators, whose normative judgments and sanctioning decisions constitute the main focus of the analysis.

Unreasonable Limitarianism

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Abstract

In this paper, I will argue that limitarianism — the view that nobody should be too rich — is an unreasonable view of distributive justice. I will develop this charge by responding to a recently popular move within the limitarian literature: As Ingrid Robeyns (2022) and Dick Timmer (2021) have suggested, limitarianism can be grounded in incompletely theorized agreements among proponents of different views of justice. As a first step, I will argue this move fails: It is neither clear if limitarianism will be the outcome of some incompletely theorized agreements. Nor is it clear that those agreements, of which it might be the outcome, can provide any justificatory value. As a second step, I will suggest that grounding limitarianism in reasonable agreement within a public reason framework is prima facie more plausible. However, despite its initial promise, I will argue that not every reasonable person necessarily has reason to accept limitarianism. More worrisome, I will show that some people may reasonably reject limitarianism. Hence, I will conclude that limitarianism is unreasonable and as such lacks the legitimacy required for any political principle. What has been suggested as a defense of limitarianism, once put under scrutiny, henceforth turns into a significant challenge that must be overcome if limitarianism is to inform public policy.

Obstacles to Achieving Relational Equality

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Abstract

This chapter examines the obstacles to realizing relational equality that emerge when questions of practical implementation are taken seriously. Building on the thesis's broader aim of grounding relational egalitarian theory in realistic assumptions about individual endorsement and institutional compliance with the demands of relational equality, the chapter identifies two central challenges. The first arises from what I understand as epistemic distance: individuals may fail to endorse the demands of relational equality because they do not epistemically relate to the wrongs experienced by others, which, broadly speaking, occurs when they do not know others' experiences. The second concerns vested interests and arbitrary power: institutions may fail to comply with egalitarian demands because they align with the vested interests and arbitrary power of a group of people. The chapter proceeds in three sections. The first section introduces the paradigmatic relational dynamic between the privileged and the oppressed, clarifying whose endorsements and which interests are at stake. The second section analyzes how epistemic distance bears on non-endorsement, and the third section examines how vested interests and arbitrary power shape institutional non-compliance. Taken together, these analyses illuminate how both individual non-endorsement and institutional non-compliance pose significant barriers to the realization of relational equality.

AVs, AI, and Accountability: Empirical Evidence on Reinforcing Accountable Behavior in Autonomous Driving

Felix Riechmann
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Abstract
TBA

Prerogatives for Bystander Intervention

Gesa Amann
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Abstract

It seems to be true that we are not always obligated to take the best course of action. Some good deeds are considered supererogatory, meaning they are optional yet preferable to other permissible acts. Examples include enduring injury to save a life or doing someone a favour. Why would this not be the case for bystanders as well? That is, given that bystanding usually consists of saving lives or preventing harms, when is it the case that we are permitted in not doing so? The aim of my talk is to determine if there are obligations for bystanders to intervene. I argue that the prevailing Sacrifice View, which holds that an act is supererogatory only if it incurs a cost to the agent's well-being, fails to provide a clear guideline for determining one's duty to intervene.

This account faces three critiques, namely the experience of costs by the supererogator, the failure to distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable costs and the unclear definition of the term costs. Yet, all three critiques point to the perspective usually taken to tackle the question whether a bystander has a duty to intervene, which is to refer to the agent's internal perspective. However, a different route is an external perspective. One account that champions this approach is the Cautionary Account (CA) (Eslami and Archer 2024). I will build upon the CA, which posits that a supererogatory act is one among several morally permissible options but is distinguished by its responsiveness to higher order cautionary reasons. According to the account, which is restricted to a specific account of virtue ethics, a supererogatory act arises from a virtue that mitigates a natural human inclination towards a specific vice.

I argue that the view entails that one has the duty to get our duties right, which in turn demands that we have the duty to know about our duties. This means that we have to place a high emphasis on the external perspective in our moral reasoning.

I show that the potential counter-argument to my account, namely that it is left unclear what the moral baseline for our external perspective is, does not hold by claiming (1) since the Sacrifice View does not hold the agent does not compare herself with regards to costs towards others, but rather (2) the agent must do her best unless she has a prerogative not to (Muñoz 2021).

Causal Mechanisms within Collective Actions

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Abstract

Bratman's leading account of collective action defines two main types of collective actions: one encompasses small-scale collective actions, commonly referred to as shared intentional activities, and the other encompasses institutional actions. Shared intentional activities and institutional actions are defined in terms of individual intentional actions. Thanks to Bratman's focus on individual intentions, it is possible to use his account to identify the actions of the individuals involved in a specific collective action. However, Bratman's account does not provide a method of distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant individual actions, neither for a specific collective action to be completed, nor for a specific output to be caused. Making this distinction is important because of the intuitive difference in evaluating the responsibility of individuals performing relevant and irrelevant actions in collective actions. I argue that we can utilise the concept of constitutive relevance, derived from the literature on causal mechanisms, to clarify the distinction between relevant and irrelevant actions analytically. Constitutive relevance, applied to Bratman's notions of collective actions, reveals the causal mechanisms as the core causal structures within collective actions.

Decisions about Blame and Punishment

Moritz Schulz
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Abstract

There is evidence that blaming somebody is only appropriate when one knows (or justifiably believes) that the object of one's blame actually did the deed. For example, Lara Buchak (2014) suggests that we cannot blame somebody on statistical grounds alone for having stolen one's phone. For Buchak, this indicates that belief and credence may be attitudes designed for different kinds of domains. We may have to look at what we believe when deciding whether to blame somebody. But we may have to look at our credences when deciding whether to invest in a start-up, say. In my talk, I am going to criticize this picture. I argue that norms about reasons for blame have two readings depending on whether these reasons are assumed to be possessed or not. On the reading I favor, there won't be a need for dividing the realm of our choices into two classes – decisions about blame can be made in the same way as decisions about where to invest one's money.

Trade Unions' Democratic Credentials: Bringing Organizing (Back) In

Lore-Marie Junghans
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Abstract

In the face of current democracies' pathologies, trade unions are slowly being put (back) on the agenda of political theorists. I argue that efforts to develop a democratic theory of trade unions benefit from integrating insights from labour studies on organizing as a promising tool for union revitalization and democratization. Organizing is a technique of uniting people for a cause associated with early 20st century radical labour practices and the civil rights movement. In contrast to mobilizing or advocacy strategies, the focus is on building long-term commitment to high-cost mass political action through bottom-up structure-building in face-to-face conversations. Championing organizing as part of a democratic theory of trade unions helps address 1) concerns regarding trade unions' democratic credentials and 2) questions of how to get the kind of institutions we need, increasingly discussed as the transition problem. Common concerns related to 1) include the worry that a) trade union bureaucracies constitute yet another form of worker domination, b) that trade unions serve the interest only of privileged to the detriment of precarious workers or the unemployed and c) that they protect the interests of their members at the expense of the general public. I highlight how organizing alleviates these concerns: organizing can against a) facilitate rank-and-file participation and leadership, against b) achieve the inclusion of the most precarious, and against c) bring about positive democratic change in the interest of the general public.

Regarding 2), I elaborate how organizing is not only a desirable approach of trade unionism, but functions as a unique bottom-up mechanism of transition independent of elite political will and top-down democratic reforms. Indeed, it is the mechanism through which many of our democratic institutions and rights were won by the labour and civil rights movements historically and through which unionization has been advanced in recent years.

The Political Strategy of Unions: Strikes during U.S. Presidential Elections

André Frank
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Abstract

Political science research suggests that strikes can mobilize and politicize voters, raising the possibility that unions strategically escalate strikes during electoral campaigns. Yet using a difference-in-differences design, I first show that strike incidence in the weeks preceding presidential election day in the United States is systematically lower in election years than in comparable weeks of non-election, non-midterm years. This contradicts the common view of unions as disruptive actors who escalate conflict before elections. Motivated by this puzzle, I examine how U.S. strike activity responds to changing electoral expectations within presidential election cycles between 2004 and 2020. Using weekly strike incidence as the outcome and polling shocks as political signals, I find that pro-Democratic poll shocks increase strike activity when the race and election day is close, but have significant pacifying effects when the election is distant. The results indicate that unions strategically adjust strike activity in line with shifting electoral prospects in ways to mobilize momentum that are more complex than suggested by the aggregate election-cycle comparison alone.

Dependence Falsification in Group Deliberation

Laura Engel
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Abstract

With the goal of manipulating beliefs and collective decision-making outcomes, strategic actors often claim that epistemic sources such as scientists or traditional media outlets are problematically dependent, copying falsehoods from each other or a third party. Correspondingly, manipulators present own claims as supported by a number of independent sources to inspire credibility. Both strategies abuse the rational principle that repeated evidence from dependent sources should be rationally discounted, while additional independent evidence can corroborate beliefs.

I provide a formal model to analyse this strategy in the context of group deliberation and collective decision-making. The model assumes that individuals have limited information about the relationships between networked sources of evidence and can misrepresent these relationships to the other deliberators. I show how such misrepresentations can alter individual beliefs and preferences for a collective decision. In particular, I prove that there can always be an opportunity and an incentive for individuals to act in this way strategically for all meaningful collective decision-making set-ups.

As the likelihood that such manipulation is possible is significant, I provide a game-theoretic analysis that suggests that if a rational individual interested in the truth is faced with a potential misrepresentation of source dependencies, she is best off making her decision entirely independent of the available evidence. This can lead to fact-insensitive reasoning and polarisation.

I therefore discuss how to minimise the probability that such manipulation is possible, considering three escape routes that supplement each other. The first one describes how an increase of independent sources while keeping dependent sources fixed can, at the limit, prevent opportunities for misrepresentations. The second discusses how to reduce incentives for manipulation by deliberatively homogenising underlying preferences. The third aims at fostering awareness of dependency relationships between sources.