GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Public policy must reflect and arbitrate between the diverse preferences of societal groups, organized interests and citizens. In democracies at least, public policy representation is one of the crucial parameters for judging the quality of governance (United Nations 2015). Accordingly, it has been the topic of a voluminous literature spanning across the disciplinary borders of Public Policy, Public Administration, Political Science, and Sociology (e.g. Achen and Bartels 2016, Burnstein 2014, Lax and Phillips 2012, Page and Shapiro 1983, Soroka and Wlezien 2010, Stimson et al. 1995, Rasmussen et al. 2015). Furthermore, inequalities in representation figure prominently on both the political agenda (Gilens 2012, Rasmussen et al. 2014). There is no lack of arguments that representation is biased towards the preferences of certain groups of citizens or organized interests at the expense of the views of the general public. As a result, there is growing interest in studying whose preferences are reflected in public policy making. This research has been based on different theoretical and methodological perspectives. Despite several seminal contributions to the research field, research has been predominantly focused on a small set of geographical regions and has rarely considered the impact of different types of societal actors within the same project. Expanding research on the theme of policy representation to other parts of the world that represent different systems of government can contribute to increasing the understanding of the mechanisms behind (bias in) policy representation. It will help judge the value of the instruments for increasing input from ordinary citizens in policy-making and regulating the behavior of lobbyists, which are increasingly an object of scholarly discussions and public debates (Baumgartner et al. 2009, Binderkrantz et al. 2015, Dür et al. 2015, Gray et al. 2004). In sum the scientific relevant of the proposed panel is in bringing the study of policy representation to the next level in terms of theory, empirical scope, and integration within the broader study of public policy making.

The objectives of the panel are:

1. to extend the scope of research on policy representation to policies and parts of the world that have so far not been systematically studied;
2. to advance our understanding of bias in policy making, both in empirical and theoretical terms, and the mechanisms through which bias occurs;
3. to bring together scholars working on policy representation from a variety of disciplines, theoretical perspectives, and normative assumptions.

Cited literature:


CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel invites papers which address one or more of the questions below. To what extent are public opinion and public policy actually aligned in different states across the world? Is policy representation to different types of societal actors the same or do we experience inequalities between different income, gender and education groups? Which role do interest groups and political parties provide when it comes to achieving policy representation? What are the theoretical mechanisms that produce or constrain policy representation? And what are the normative implications of the presence or absence of policy representation in different kinds of systems? Contributions assessing policy representation in a comparative manner and in new contexts beyond the well-studied Western democracies are especially encouraged.

Session 1

Thursday, June 29th 13:30 to 15:30 (Block B 4 - 3)

Discussants

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Coalition Government and Policy Responsiveness in Western Europe

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Whereas recent research has expanded the study of policy responsiveness to a broad range of political systems, existing cross-national studies focus primarily on the impact of political institutions and only rarely pay attention to the way responsiveness is embedded in the patterns of party government, and the role of coalitions in particular. We examine how coalition conflict and government positions influence policy making and moderate the relationship between public opinion and public policy. Our study is based on a new dataset that tracks policy-making activity with regard to 306 specific policy issues in three countries (Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom) over four years and combines information on public preferences with measures of government positions, coalition conflict, and media salience. We find a systematic but relatively weak in substantive terms positive impact of public support on the likelihood and speed of policy change. While coalition conflict has only a weak negative direct effect on policy change and no effect on responsiveness as such, we find that more right-wing governments are both less likely to enact policy changes and less responsive to public opinion.
In view of this, the following research question is presented: What formats of shared mandate are used in legislative matters. The objective of this essay is to analyze an alternative form of delegated representation that promises to soften the representative crisis in legislative bodies: shared mandates. A shared mandate is a form of legislative representation in which constituents keep control of the mandate through direct participation. In shared mandates, the legislator voluntary sacrifices her voting autonomy to empower constituents, making the mandate more responsive and accountable. Shared mandates works under an agreement between a legislative representative and citizens for cooperatively exercise the legislative power of a mandate. Thus, a shared mandate is a form of delegated representation in which citizens determine the voting preference of their representative and her legislative activity. Shared mandate means that the legislative mandate does not belong to the political party or the incumbent representative but, in fact, to a group of citizens sharing the mandate.

The theoretical inspiration for shared mandates is the delegated form of representation and direct democracy applied to the legislative power. A shared mandate is a delegated model of representation (Pitkin, 1967), a type of promissory representation (Mansbridge, 2003), and an example of the ambassador and the pared-down delegate type of the Rehfeld’s distinction of representativeness (Rehfeld, 2009). Delegated representation is an alternative to the widely used trustee model in which representatives are not expected to correspond strictly to the constituents’ preferences, but they rather have an ethical obligation towards “the general interest” (Burke 1774; Pitkin 1967). As there is an information asymmetry between citizens and politicians, the political agent is tempted to defend other interests, which may be conflictive to those of constituents. In few words, the trustee model is prone to fail in its very basic element: trust. Facing this, shared mandate presents itself as a strategy to bridge this gap through binding consultation of constituencies that inform and determine the representative’s position in legislative matters.

In view of this, the following research question is presented: What formats of shared mandate are used in
contemporary democracies as an alternative to confront the representative crisis? To answer this question, the study uses a multiple case study to discuss different formats of shared mandates in countries with evidence of its utilization: Sweden, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, and the United States. The variables to analyze the empirical data are the following: initiative, size, eligibility, access, permanence, distribution, and extent of power, costs, benefits, and decision-making process. The study breaks down the variables in different analytical categories in order to analyze the empirical cases.

Given that the objective of this study has common objectives to those of the T02P10 panel, such as understanding "Which role do interest groups and political parties provide when it comes to achieving policy representation?", it seems clear that the discussion about shared mandates and delegated representation has the potential to bring light to the panel discussion.