

Seminar in Political Behavior

W10: Elite Responsiveness

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Plan for Today

1. Basic Concepts
2. Pereira 2021
3. Pereira and Öhberg 2024
4. Tips for Next Time

Basic Concepts

Questions in Mind

- Why should these politicians be responsive?
- How to make them responsive?
- Why did some politicians fail to be responsive?

Types of Representation (Pitkin 1967)¹

- Four types of representation:
 - Descriptive representation: Do representatives resemble the represented?
 - Demographic characteristics of representatives.
 - Substantive representation: Do policy outputs/MP actions represent the preferences of the represented?
 - Policy outputs, roll call votes and bills passed in the parliament...etc.
 - Symbolic representation: Do representatives “stand for” (i.e., have a meaning for) the represented?
 - Voters’ feeling about the representative.
 - Formal representation: (1) Are elections considered legitimate by most voters? (2) Can voters hold representatives accountable?
 - Electoral system, satisfaction with democracy.

¹Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press.

From Static to Dynamic

- Representation is not only static but also dynamic.
- Stimson et al. (1995)²: "**Dynamic**" representation.
 - We also call it "**policy responsiveness**."
- Being responsive means that politicians (or parties) **change their policy positions in the same direction as shifts in public opinion**.
- Why? Two pathways:
 - Institutional perspective: Election is a mechanism to ensure the ensure that the representative can reflect current public opinion.
 - Rational choice perspective: Politicians/parties have reelection incentives to be responsive.

²Stimson, James A., Michael B. Mackuen, and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 89(3): 543–65.

Sometimes It Doesn't work...

- Adams et al. (2006): Only mainstream parties are responsive.
- Adams and Ezrow (2009): Parties are more responsive to those who regularly participate in political discussions and persuasion.
- Homola (2019): Parties are more responsive to men than women.
- Commonplace of these three articles:
 - Focus on shifts in party positions.
 - What we know is the **outcome** (i.e. not being responsive), but why did they make this counterintuitive choice?

Pereira 2021

Biases in Elite Beliefs

Pereira, Miguel M. 2021. "Understanding and Reducing Biases in Elite Beliefs About the Electorate." *American Political Science Review* 115(4): 1308-1324.

- Research question(s)?
 1. Why reelection-seeking officials misperceive public preferences?
 2. How to mitigate these "distorted" beliefs?
- Is the information available to legislators *complete*? Mostly incomplete.
- Also, some information is more accessible than others.
 - Is this subset of information representative for all available information? No.
 - So what are the causes of this inequality of accessibility of information as the author identified?
 1. Inequalities in exposure to voters.
 2. The policy preferences of legislators themselves.

Biases in Elite Beliefs

- Inequalities in exposure to voters
 - Some voters have more access to political elites. What are some characteristics of these voters?
 - Wealthy, organized, politically engaged, well-connected.
 - Basically a more privileged segments of society. → more resources.
 - Also, policymakers are drawn disproportionately from this segment of society.
 - Thus political elites can be more familiar with their opinion, and thus it would be more easily to recall them.
 - **Exposure hypothesis:** Elected officials are more likely to misperceive public opinion when high status voters disagree with the majority. ($MP = High \neq Majority$)

Biases in Elite Beliefs

- The policy preferences of legislators themselves
 - Even if $High = Majority$, it is also possible that $MP \neq Majority$. Why?
 - **Social projection:** "the propensity to overestimate the degree to which others share our attitudes and beliefs."
 - *We can also engage in social projection.
 - Butler and Dynes (2016)³: These patterns among elites may be due to a tendency to discount opinions they disagree with.
 - Social projection → elite misperceptions.
 - **Social Projection Hypothesis:** Elected officials are more likely to misperceive public opinion when disagreeing with the majority position on a given policy issue. ($MP \neq Majority$)

³Butler, Daniel M., and Adam M. Dynes. 2016. "How Politicians Discount the Opinions of Constituents with Whom They Disagree." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(4): 975–89.

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 1

- Background: Sweden
 - Forms of government: Parliamentary democracy with monarch
 - Electoral system: Open-list PR
 - MPs are held accountable by their **party supporter**, i.e. constituency here refers to **party constituency**.
 - Esaiasson and Holmberg (1996): "In the Swedish context, the party base is considered the most relevant constituency for representatives"
 - Swedish Parliamentary Survey (RDU, Riksdagsundersökningen): Asking MPs once every term about their own opinion and constituency preferences on the same set of issues.
 - Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) and SOM Institute Surveys: Ask the identical set of issues, but respondents are citizens, not MPs.

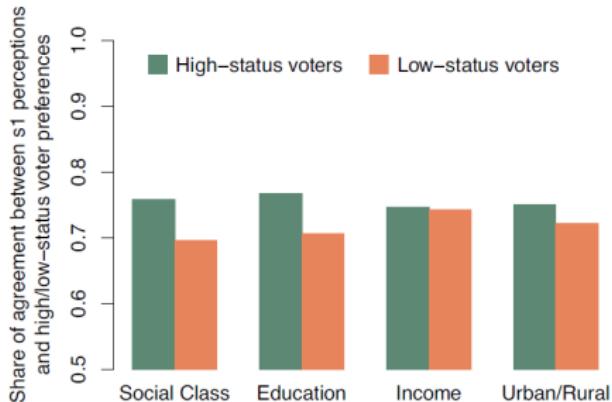
Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 1

- Research design
 - Outcome/DV: Perceptual accuracy
 - How to measure?
 - $\text{Perceptual Accuracy} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } MP = \text{Majority} \\ 0 & \text{if } MP \neq \text{Majority} \end{cases}$
 - $\overline{\text{PerceptualAccuracy}} = 0.73$
 - IV: voter status (high or low)
 - Four types of categorization of voters
 - **White-collar** vs. Blue-collar
 - **High education** vs. Low education
 - **High income** vs. Low income
 - **Urban** vs. Rural

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 1

- Result:

FIGURE 2. Share of Policies Where MP Perceptions of Majority Preferences Align with High-status/Low-status Voter Preferences

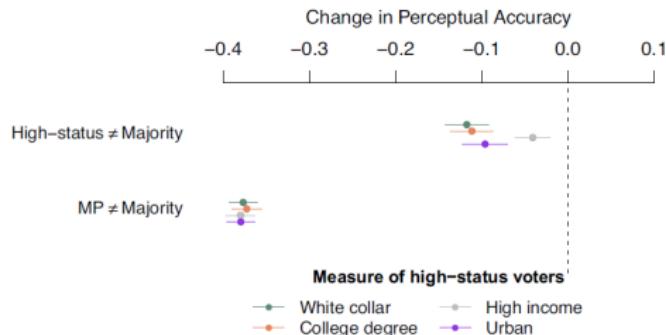


Note: Each bar represents the share of policy assessments in the parliamentary survey where MP perceptions of constituency preferences aligned with the majority opinion among different operationalizations of high/low-status voters (described along the x-axis).

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 1

- Result:

FIGURE 3. The Role of High-status Voters and MP Personal Preferences in Perceptual Accuracy

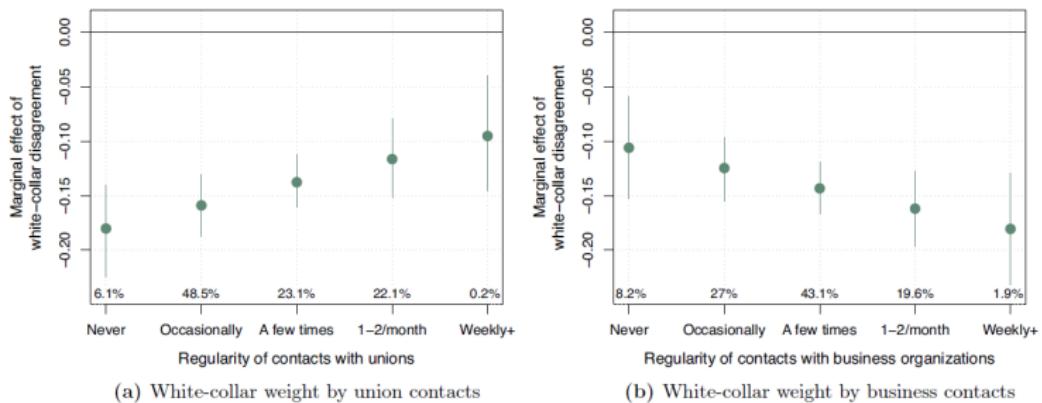


Note: Dots are estimates from linear probability models with perceptual accuracy as the outcome variable. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The main predictors are listed on the y-axis. Each color represents a different model based on the operationalization of high-status voters. Full model results in Table C1.

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 1

- Mechanism test: MP contacts with blue-collar unions and businesses

FIGURE 4. The Marginal Effects of White-collar Voters Disagreeing with the Majority on Perceptual Accuracy Conditional on MP Contacts with Blue-collar Unions and Businesses

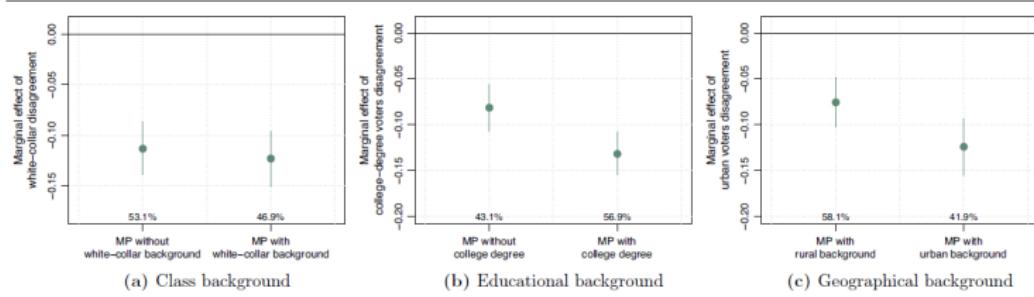


Note: Dots are marginal effects of white-collar voters disagreeing with majority on perceptual accuracy, conditional on the regularity of contacts with blue-collar unions (panel a) and businesses (panel b). Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals. Numbers along x-axis describe the distribution of the conditioning variable. See Table C9 for full results.

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 1

- Mechanism test: MP's background

FIGURE 5. The Marginal Effects of High-status Voters Disagreement on Perceptual Accuracy Conditional on MPs' Class Background, Educational Background, and Geographical Background



Note: Dots are marginal effects of high-status voters disagreeing with majority on perceptual accuracy, conditional on the MP's class (panel a), educational (panel b), or geographical (panel c) background. The operationalization of high-status voters in each model is described along the y-axis and was chosen to be consistent with the moderator. Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals. Numbers along the x-axis describe the distribution of the conditioning variable. See Table C10 for full results.

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 2

- Study 1 gave us an idea about biases in elite beliefs about electorate
- Study 2 further tests whether these biases in elite beliefs can be reduced

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 2

- Background: Switzerland
 - Holds nationwide referendum almost every year
 - Provides a unique opportunity to study how to reduce biases in elite perceptions

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 2

- Experimental design
 - Original survey experiment conducted with local representatives in Switzerland before 2018 November referendum
 - Focusing on two proposals: a) Giving the Swiss constitution precedence over international law ;b) Subsidising farmers not dehorning their livestock
 - Local representatives are asked to guess the preference of the majority of their constituency, and they are divided into three groups
 1. Pure control (PC)
 2. Exposure condition: Receive information about the composition of the electorate in their municipality
 3. Exposure + Self-awareness condition: Information for the second group + a recommendation to avoid projecting their own preferences on constituents

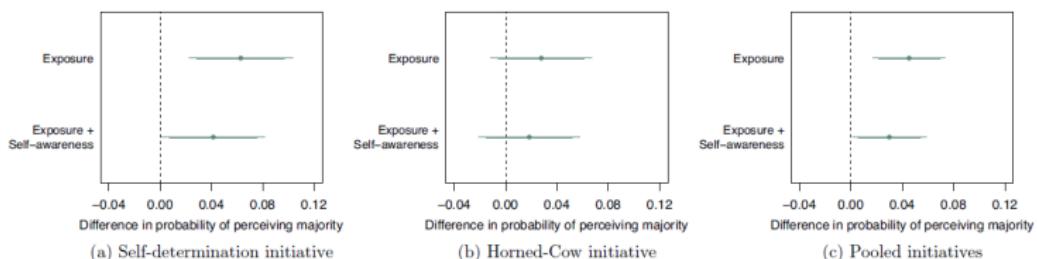
Box 1. Self-awareness Vignette

Decades of research show that people tend to project their own preferences to others. **Without noticing, we often overestimate approval for issues we support, while underestimating approval for issues we oppose.** Try to take this into account when making your prediction.

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 2

- Result:

FIGURE 6. The Causal Effects of Exposure and Self-awareness of Social Projection on Perceptual Accuracy, by Referendum

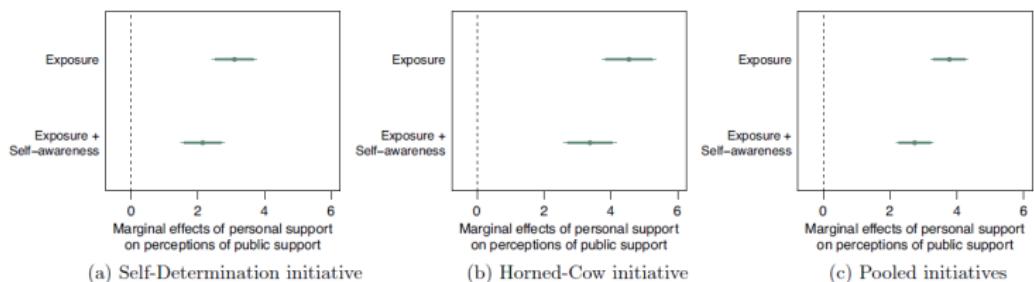


Note: Points are estimates of the difference in the probability of local officials correctly perceiving the majority opinion in their constituency by treatment condition (control = baseline and treatment groups described in the row labels). Wider/thinner horizontal lines are 95 % and 90 % confidence intervals. See Table F1 for full results.

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 2

- Estimating the effect of self-awareness:

FIGURE 7. The Effects of Self-awareness on the Propensity of Legislators to Project Their Preferences on the Electorate, by Referendum



Note: Points are estimates of the effect of policy support on perceptions of public support, by treatment group (described in the row labels). Wider/thinner horizontal lines are 90 % and 95 % confidence intervals. Control group omitted from the analysis to isolate the effect of the self-awareness intervention. Full model results in Table F2.

Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 2

- Estimating the effect of self-awareness (but in regression table):

Table F2: The effects of self-awareness on the propensity of legislators to project their preferences on the electorate. Complement to Figure 7.

	<i>Predicted support</i>		
	Self-Determination		Horned-Cow
	(1)	(2)	Pooled (3)
Own support	3.10** (0.34)	4.54** (0.41)	3.77** (0.28)
Exposure & Self-Awareness	1.22 (1.13)	2.68* (1.36)	1.93* (0.92)
Own support × [Exposure & Self-Awareness]	-0.95* (0.48)	-1.17* (0.58)	-1.04** (0.40)
Horned-Cow Initiative	-	-	-7.33** (0.42)
Constant	37.63** (0.80)	26.88** (0.96)	36.01** (0.67)
Observations	1,803	1,797	3,600
Adjusted R ²	0.06	0.09	0.13

Note: Entries are OLS estimates of the effect of policy support on perceptions of public support, by treatment group (SEs in parenthesis, and cluster-robust SEs in model 3). Control group omitted to isolate the effect of the self-awareness intervention. *p<0.05; **p<0.01

Biases in Elite Beliefs

- Conclusion
 - Yes, Elite misperception in their electorates does exist.
 - Why?
 - Privileged subconstituency effect ✓
 - Social projection effect ✓
 - Can we fix it? With what means?
 - Maybe yes?
 - Exposure ✓
 - Self-awareness? Sort of. But not enough to offset the effect of social projection
- Any thoughts?

Pereira and Öhberg 2024

The Expertise Paradox

Pereira, Miguel M., and Patrik Öhberg. 2024. "The Expertise Paradox: How Policy Expertise Can Hinder Responsiveness." *British Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 474–91.

- Research question: Why do politicians dismiss voters' opinions on certain policy issues, despite incentives to be responsive? And what's the role of policy expertise in elite misperception?
- What is "the expertise paradox"?

The Expertise Paradox

- The role of expertise in policy-making
 - Legislators with more specialized knowledge → Policy innovation within specific issue area
 - Committee system: committee members as "low-cost specialists."
- How did expertise shape the way legislators evaluate information and make decisions?
 - Over-confidence
 - Less willing to admit that they don't know something in their area of specialization
 - Social norms entitle experts to adopt more dogmatic and forceful positions
- They may thus fail to represent their constituents' interests
 - Implication? can thus lose the election
- Mechanism? motivated reasoning

The Expertise Paradox: Study 1

- Experimental design
 - "We asked elected officials to evaluate a hypothetical policy appeal made by a group of constituents. The content of the appeal was altered to isolate the effect of expertise on politicians' responses to the message."
 - Two pretreatment items: a)measures of policy expertise; b) the officials' preferences on the policies included in the vignette
 - Ask MPs to identify the areas they have **more** and **less** expertise on
 - Random assignment: MPs were randomly assigned to a) low-expertise and b) high-expertise conditions. They would receive policy appeals within that policy area.
 - Ask respondents to evaluate a putative message sent from a group of constituents (see next slide)
 - Finally measuring legislators' reaction in 7-point Likert scale

The Expertise Paradox: Study 1

Box 1. Example of constituents' appeal on one of the five issue areas: healthcare

Different groups of voters contact politicians with political propositions. Imagine the following: a group of voters is approaching you and wants you to [support/oppose] a proposal to ban companies from running hospitals. They believe that healthcare is facing major challenges. They see equality as a central issue. Their main argument is that a ban on companies operating hospitals makes it [easier/more difficult] for vulnerable patients to choose the healthcare they need.

The Expertise Paradox: Study 1

- Result:

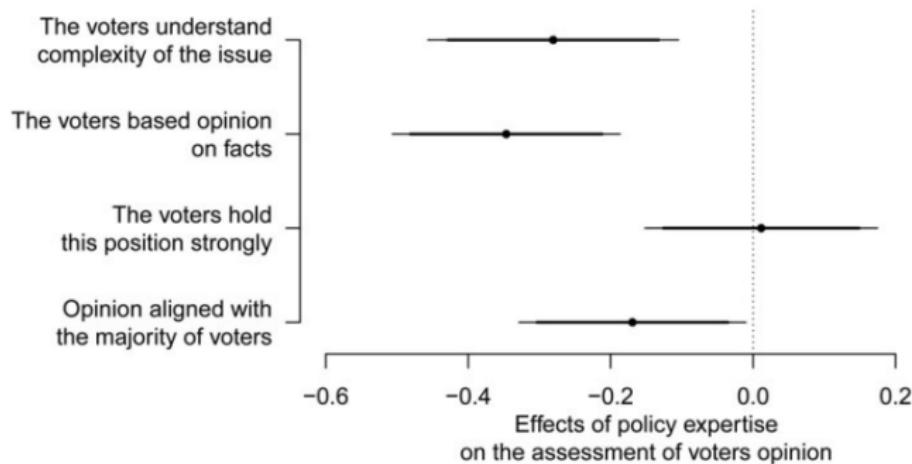


Figure 1. The effects of expertise on legislators' ability to incorporate contrasting views.

Note: Points are estimates of the causal effect of policy expertise on legislators' assessments of voters' opinions. Horizontal narrow/wide lines are 95%/90% confidence intervals. Agreement with each statement listed on the y-axis corresponds to a distinct outcome variable. Estimates and standard errors are derived from linear models with covariate adjustment for party, age, and education. Table C1 reports the full model results.

The Expertise Paradox: Study 1

- Result by issue areas:

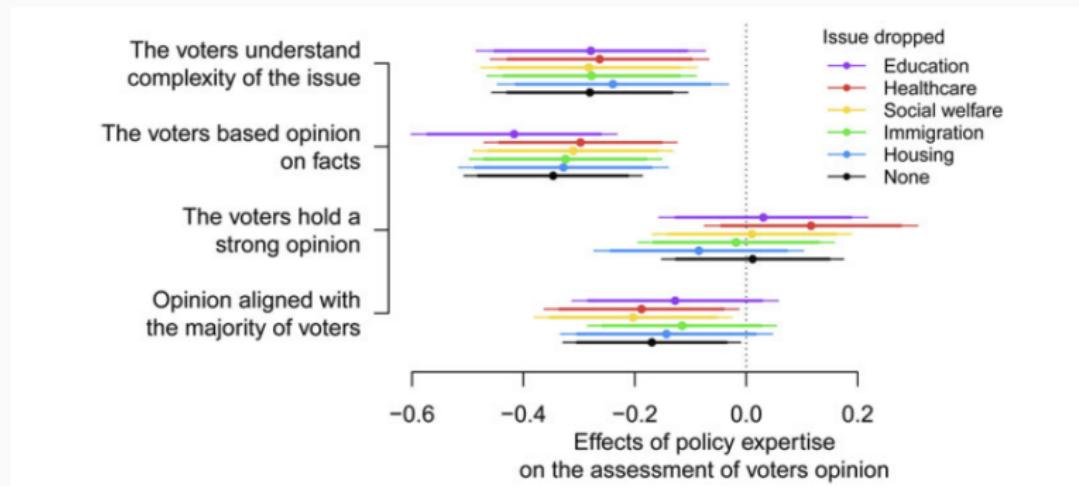


Figure 2. The effects of expertise on legislators' ability to incorporate contrasting views, excluding one policy issue in turn.
Note: Points are estimates of the causal effect of policy expertise on legislators' assessment of voters' opinions after dropping one policy issue. Horizontal narrow/wide lines are 95%/90% confidence intervals. Agreement with each statement listed on the y-axis corresponds to a distinct outcome variable. Estimates and clustered standard errors derived from linear models with covariate adjustment for party, age, and education.

The Expertise Paradox: Study 1

- Different expertise: Formal and Passive
 - Formal expertise: results from an extended study of a particular topic
 - Operationalization: College degree (0 or 1)
 - Passive expertise: exposure through life experience and the position one occupies in a society or culture
 - Operationalization: Measured the respondents' time in office

The Expertise Paradox: Study 1

- Result:

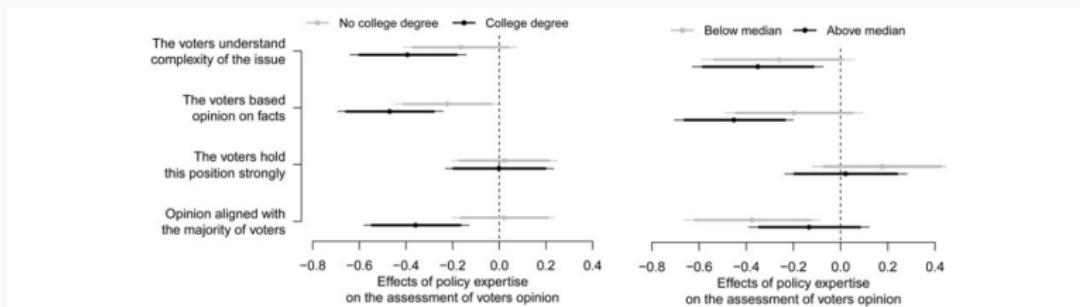


Figure 3. The effects of expertise on the legislators' ability to incorporate contrasting views by form of expertise.

Note: Points are estimates of the causal effect of policy expertise on legislators' assessments of officials' opinions among officials with/without a college degree (panel a) and officials with above-/below-median experience in office (panel b). Horizontal narrow/wide bars are 95%/90% confidence intervals. Agreement with each statement listed on the y-axis corresponds to a distinct outcome variable. Estimates and standard errors derived from linear models with covariate adjustment for party and age. Full model results are in Tables C2 and C3.

The Expertise Paradox: Study 2

- Mechanism test
- Experimental design
- Treatment: expertise prime

As a public official, you have to deal with a variety of policy issues. In some instances, this involves making decisions on issues you have extensive experience in. **Please take two minutes to describe an instance when your specific policy expertise was important to solve an issue or push legislation forward.**

- Placebo prime: asking respondents to describe, in two minutes, how they first got interested in politics.
- Outcome:
 - 'I often have doubts about my own decisions in office' → self-confidence
 - 'It is a waste of time to pay attention to certain ideas.' → openness to different opinions

The Expertise Paradox: Study 2

- Result: Weak effect

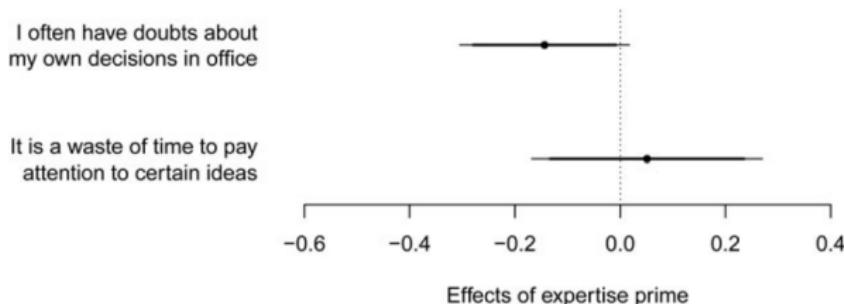


Figure 4. The effects of priming expertise on self-confidence and dogmatism.

Note: Points are estimates of the causal effect of expertise on self-confidence (top estimate) and close-minded cognition (bottom estimate). Horizontal narrow/wide bars are 95%/90% confidence intervals: estimates and standard errors derived from linear models with covariate adjustment for party, age, and education. Full model results can be found in Table C4.

The Expertise Paradox

- Conclusion
 - A trade-off between electing policy experts and responsive representatives
 - Policy expertise → disregard the views of constituents with whom they disagree
 - Experts are also less likely to believe that voters with preferences different from their own can reflect the majority's position.
 - Self-confidence induced by specialized knowledge can partially explain these patterns.
- Any thoughts?

Tips for Next Time

Tips for Next Time

- Next time will be W12(11/19)
- Two articles:
 - Slothuus, Rune, and Martin Bisgaard. 2021. "How political parties shape public opinion in the real world." *American Journal of Political Science* 65(4): 896-911.
 - Dickson, Zachary P., and Sara B. Hobolt. 2025. "Elite Cues and Noncompliance." *American Political Science Review* 119(2): 870-86.
- Using "Difference-in-Differences (DiD)"
 - Don't freak out immediately
 - Consider 4 groups:
 - Treatment(T) and Control(C) (2)
 - Before and After (2)
 - 2×2
 - We will go over it next time
- Start from Slothuus and Bisgaard (2021) one. Then head to Dickson and Hobolt (2025) one.