

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

- 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.

- 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. ($MP = High \neq Majority$)

- 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 pattern 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.

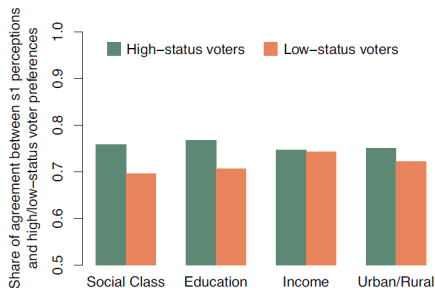
Biases in Elite Beliefs: Study 1

- Research design
 - Outcome/DV: Perceptual accuracy
 - How to measure?
 - $Perceptual\ Accuracy = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } MP = \text{Majority} \\ 0 & \text{if } MP \neq \text{Majority} \end{cases}$
 - $\overline{PerceptualAccuracy} = 0.73$
 - 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:

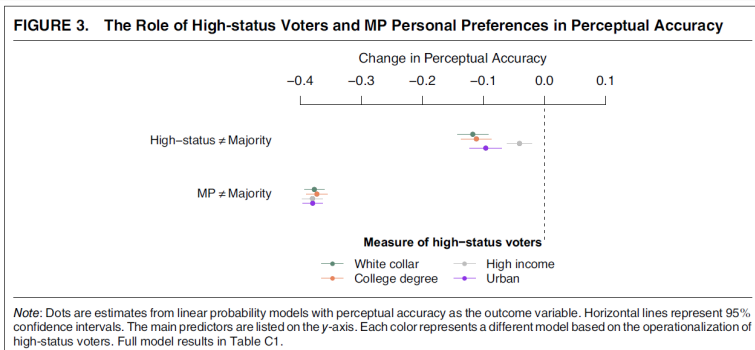
FIGURE 2. Share of Policies Where MP Perceptions of Majority Preferences Align with High-status/Low-status Voter Preferences



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

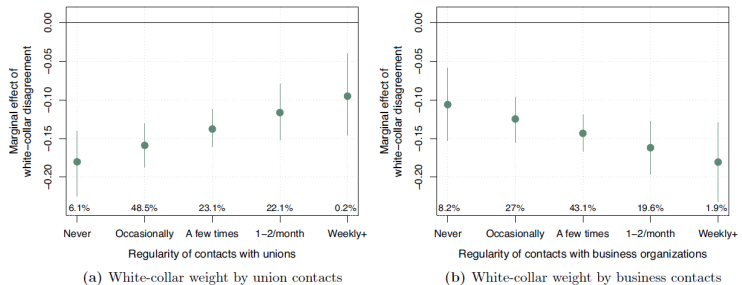
- Result:



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

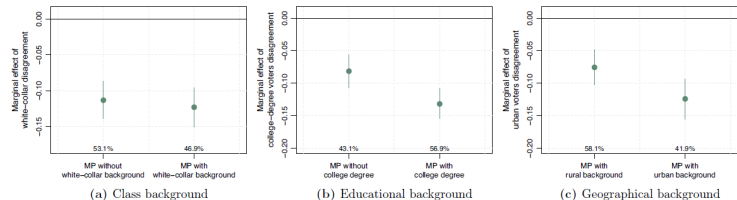


Note: Dots are marginal effects of white-collar voters disagreeing with majority on perceptual accuracy, conditional on the regularity of contacts with blue-collar unions (panel a) and businesses (panel b). Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals. Numbers along x-axis describe the distribution of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

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

- 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

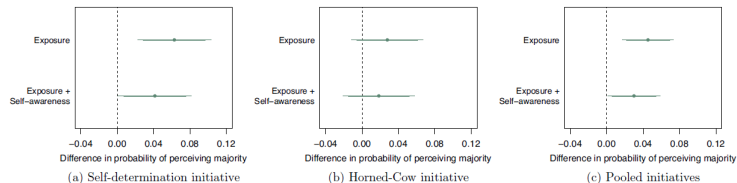
Box 1. Self-awareness Vignette

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

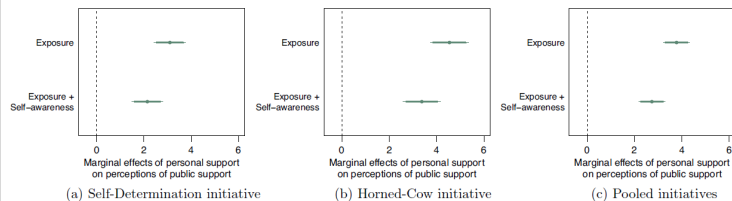


Note: Points are estimates of the difference in the probability of local officials correctly perceiving the majority opinion in their constituency by treatment condition (control = baseline and treatment groups described in the row labels). Wider/thinner horizontal lines are 95% and 90% confidence intervals. 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	Pooled
	(1)	(2)	(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

- 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:

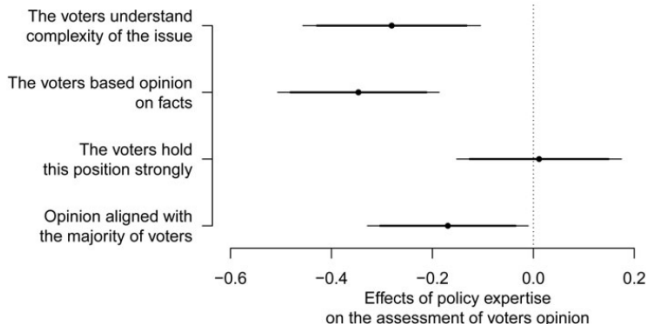


Figure 1. The effects of expertise on legislators' ability to incorporate contrasting views.

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:

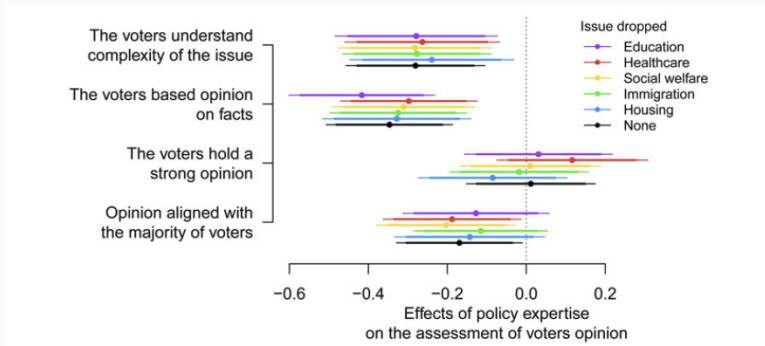


Figure 2. The effects of expertise on legislators' ability to incorporate contrasting views, excluding one policy issue in turn. *Note:* Points are estimates of the causal effect of policy expertise on legislators' assessment of voters' opinions after dropping one policy issue. Horizontal narrow/wide 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:

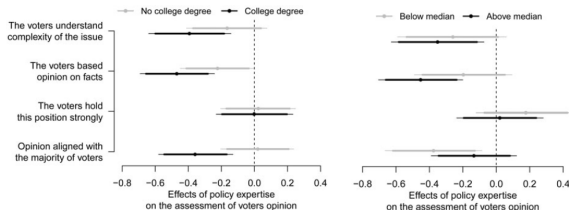


Figure 3. The effects of expertise on the legislators' ability to incorporate contrasting views by form of expertise.

Note: Points are estimates of the causal effect of policy expertise on legislators' assessments of voters' opinion 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

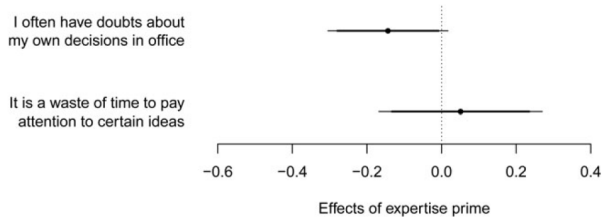


Figure 4. The effects of priming expertise on self-confidence and dogmatism.

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.