

The politics of public allocation of scarce goods: Evidence from the COVID-19 vaccination programme

Public resources are often scarce goods and decision-makers therefore have to decide who gets public resources when. Such allocation decisions touch upon the basic fabrics that tie societies together as it is a normative question which citizens should be prioritized in the distribution of public goods. The public allocation of goods is therefore often a highly political issue that is often severely contested. Challengers such as right-wing populist parties and extremist social movements often exploit citizen dissatisfaction with the allocation of public goods. For instance, recent research shows that right wing populist parties are particularly successful when socioeconomic inequality in societies is high (Engler and Weisstanner 2020; Stoetzer, Giesecke and Klüver 2020). Dissatisfaction with government allocation decisions threaten social cohesion. In this project, we therefore seek to answer the following research questions: What determines citizens' attitudes towards public allocation and what can governments do to increase citizen support and solidarity in a society? To address these questions, we study the allocation of the COVID-19 vaccine during the current pandemic. The roll-out of the vaccination program provides a unique opportunity to study the determinants of citizens' attitudes towards the public allocation of scarce goods. On the one hand, becoming vaccinated is a matter of life and death for citizens with health issues. On the other hand, vaccination will likely come with important privileges related to personal freedoms and mobility as current discussions in many countries show. Thus, the COVID-19 vaccination program does not only provide important cross-sectional and temporal variation, but is a highly salient issue for all citizens worldwide. The results of our project have implications for SCRIPTS and current public debates. On the one hand, we will shed light on what determines citizens' attitudes towards public allocation of scarce goods, but we will also identify ways to increase individual compliance, citizen support for government policy, and social solidarity. The findings will provide policy-makers with practical recommendations that are relevant for both the current COVID-19 vaccination programme and longer term strategies to raise support for the public allocation of goods more generally.