

ENFRANCHISEMENT AND LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIVENESS TO YOUNGER VOTERS: EVIDENCE FROM SCOTLAND

2022 ECPR Joint Sessions Workshop

Zachary P Dickson¹ & Tevfik Murat Yildirim²

April 2022

University of Glasgow¹ & University of Stavanger²

- In 2014, the Scottish Parliament extended the franchise to 16 and 17 year-olds for the independence referendum
- Shifting legislative focus – Young people and their issue priorities – an opportunity for climate change
- Might enfranchising 16 & 17 year-olds enhance substantive representation of younger voters' policy priorities in parliament?
- If so, does the reform motivate parliament to give greater attention to other issues important to younger voters, such as youth employment and education?

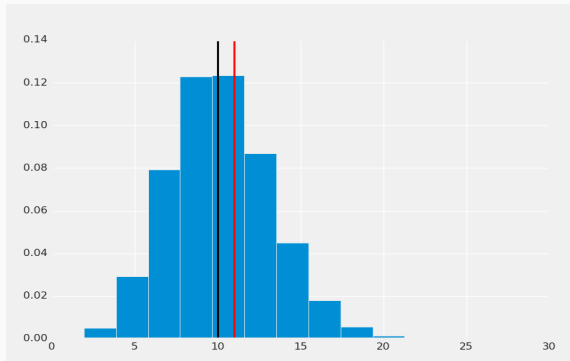
HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSIVENESS?

- Responsiveness is an ongoing, dynamic process (Stimson, MacKuen, & Erikson, 1995)
- Responsiveness as the strategic allocation of attention to different issues (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010)
- We look to legislators' speeches in HOC and Scottish Parliament to measure attention to the issues surveyed
- To identify speeches, we train Word2Vec embeddings models (Mikolov, Sutskever, Chen, Corrado, & Dean, 2013) on legislators' speeches in each assembly
- Models are then used to build keyword dictionaries by performing semantic similarity queries using the issue as a seed word¹

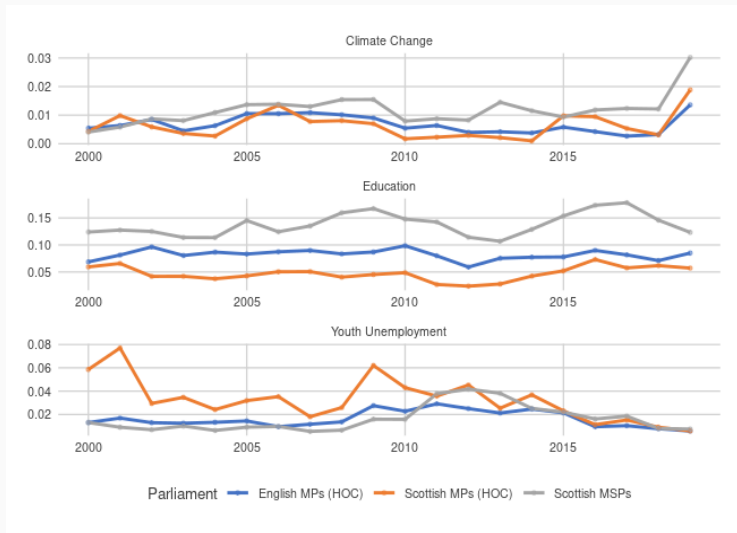
¹see Appendix A

WHY SHOULD CHANGING THE VOTING AGE AFFECT RESPONSIVENESS?

- Enfranchising younger voters shifts the distribution of preferences on issues for which age conditions degree of prioritisation



ANNUAL RESPONSIVENESS BY PARLIAMENT AND ISSUE



DID LOWERING THE VOTING AGE INCREASE ATTENTION?

- We used the synthetic control method to estimate counterfactuals
- Limited support on education, more for climate and youth employment

Table: Annual estimates of responsiveness to climate change

Treatment period	ATT	S.E.	CI Lower	CI upper	p-value
2013	0.31554	0.2015	-0.07945	0.7105	0.11742
2014	0.49637	0.3372	-0.16453	1.1573	0.14101
2015	-0.02022	0.4925	-0.98541	0.9450	0.96725
2016	0.86829	0.7161	-0.53525	2.2718	0.22531
2017	1.15408	0.7099	-0.23727	2.5454	0.10401
2018	1.09896*	0.6237	-0.12344	2.3214	0.07806
2019	0.99035*	0.5384	-0.06481	2.0455	0.06583
ATT (Mean)	0.7646	0.5208	-0.2561	1.785	0.1421

DID LOWERING THE VOTING AGE INCREASE ATTENTION?

Table: Annual estimates of responsiveness to youth employment

Treatment period	ATT	S.E.	CI Lower	CI upper	p-value
2013	0.59455**	0.2470	0.11042	1.07868	0.016085
2014	0.31878	0.3139	-0.29642	0.93399	0.309819
2015	0.30913	0.5826	-0.83267	1.45093	0.595668
2016	1.14004	0.7732	-0.37541	2.65549	0.140362
2017	1.31978	0.8380	-0.32275	2.96230	0.115293
2018	1.06727	0.6644	-0.23501	2.36955	0.108216
2019	1.41416**	0.6102	0.21822	2.61010	0.020471
ATT (Mean)	0.9282	0.5706	-0.1901	2.047	0.1038

- Lowering the voting age led to a short term increase in attention, but did not lead to measurable substantive change
- Other items, such as Brexit, likely dominated parliamentary attention
- Parliamentarians may opt for other means to speak to younger voters, such as social media

References

- Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (2010). *Agendas and instability in american politics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mikolov, T., Sutskever, I., Chen, K., Corrado, G. S., & Dean, J. (2013). Distributed representations of words and phrases and their compositionality. *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 26.
- Stimson, J. A., MacKuen, M. B., & Erikson, R. S. (1995). Dynamic representation. *American Political Science Review*, 89(3), 543–565.

Thanks!

What questions can I answer?

Comments?