



UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN



The Roots of Political Inequality and the Working of Democratic Representation

Centre Universitaire de Norvège à Paris, CUNP

24-25 October 2019

Workshop organized by Yvette Peters and the team of the Politics of Inequality project

The working of democracy hinges on the well-functioning of a form of political representation, and well as a commitment to political inequality. And because democratic politics practically function through the mechanism of political representation, this phenomenon has been studied extensively over the last decades. While numerous studies find that representation works fairly well—representatives' and citizens' overall preferences are generally quite congruent, and people tend to overall get what they want politically—there have been a number of scholars that reported some alarming findings. For one, representatives tend to respond more to some citizens when being contacted by them. For another, policies made by legislators tend to be more in line with some people rather than with others. Moreover, political representatives do not always reflect citizen preferences equally, nor do they reflect personal and socio-economic characteristics among the population particularly well.

The overall conclusion is that politics appears more unequal than one would expect given the democratic principle of political equality. The result is that not everyone is equally likely to get what they want. Most notably, those who are poorer, women, or of a (traditionally) minority background tend to be relatively under-represented. The papers in this workshop will deal with the topic of political representation and political equality, examining the ways that representation works and how political equality might be achieved. With that, it aims to contribute to both the academic and societal debates on how to improve the functioning of our democracy. It does so by offering a better understanding of how political representation works and why some people are more likely to get what they want.

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Workshop venue

Centre Universitaire de Norvège à Paris, CUNP,
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PROGRAM

Thursday 24 October 2019

10.00-10.30: Introduction
Understanding political inequality—Yvette Peters

Session 1. Sources of inequality 1: Priorities and regulations

Chair: Yvette Peters

10.30-11.10 **Nathalie Giger:** What rich and poor consider important and how this matters for representation

Discussant: Trajche Panov

11.10-11.50 **Ruben Mathisen:** Unequal responsiveness in Norway? How the rich affect policy outcomes

Discussant: Jonas Pontusson

12.00-13.00: Lunch

Session 2. Congruence and representatives' roles

Chair: Jan Rosset

13.10-13.50 **Mia Costa:** Policy Congruence for All or Negative Partisanship for the Base? What Motivates How Elites Represent Citizens

Discussant: Sveinung Arnesen

13.50-14.30 **Troy Broderstad:** The Delegate-Trustee Dilemma of Democratic Legitimacy

Discussant: Andrea Fumarola

14.30-14.45: Coffee break

Session 3. Sources of inequality 2: Parties, recruitment, and selection

Chair: Sveinung Arnesen

14.45-15.25 **Jana Belschner:** From involvement to election. How temporal, financial, and political resources shape young people's political careers

Discussant: Edgard Dewitte

15.25-16.05 **Jan Rosset:** The electoral roots of unequal representation. Party supply and spatial voting in Europe

Discussant: Jana Belschner

16.05-16.20: Coffee break

Session 4. Sources of inequality 3: Perceptions and bias

Chair: Troy Broderstad

16.20-17.00 **Jonas Pontusson:** Descriptive Misrepresentation by Social Class: Do Voter Preferences Matter?



Discussant: Amory Gethin

17.00-17.40 **Andrea Fumarola & Yvette Peters:** Who do representatives represent? The Assessment of Public Opinion as a Source of Political Inequality

Discussant: Ragnhild Muriaas

20.00: Dinner

Friday 25 October

09.50 Welcome to CUNP—Johannes Hjellbrekke

Session 5. Citizens' evaluation of representation: Political legitimacy

Chair: Ragnhild Muriaas

10.00-10.40 **Trajche Panov:** Political Representation and the legitimacy of the political decisions: The role of internet

Discussant: Troy Broderstad

10.40-11.20 **Anne Rasmussen:** Interest Groups, Policy Representation and the Legitimacy of Governance

Discussant: Ruben Mathisen

11.20-12.00 **Sveinung Arnesen & Yvette Peters:** Upward Representation Bias: How Voters Sustain Political Inequality

Discussant: Mia Costa

12.00-13.00: Lunch

Session 6. Sources of inequality 4: Voter preferences and recruitment

Chair: Yvette Peters

13.10-13.50 **Amory Gethin:** Political Cleavages and Inequality. Evidence from Electoral Democracies, 1950-2018

Discussant: Nathalie Giger

13.50-14.30 **Ragnhild Muriaas:** Gender balance and political recruitment

Discussant: Anne Rasmussen

14.30-15.10 **Edgard Dewitte:** Why not me? 100 years of Political Selection in the United Kingdom

Discussant: Jan Rosset

15.10-15.30: Coffee break

Session 7. Conclusions

15.30-16.00 **Yvette Peters:** conclusions



PAPER ABSTRACTS

Upward Representation Bias: How Voters Sustain Political Inequality

Sveinung Arnesen, Dominik Duell, Mikael Poul Johannesson, Yvette Peters

Inequality in representation is linked to inequality in participation, where social groups with low turnout levels in elections tend to be underrepresented in decision-making bodies. Equality in participation has thus rightfully been identified in the literature as a pivotal concern to achieve equality in representation. We show here, however, that equal participation is an insufficient condition due to what we label as the upward representation bias: citizens of lower socioeconomic status tend to want politicians of higher socioeconomic status, even if the citizens know their political views will be less represented. We demonstrate this phenomenon using a candidate choice experiment fielded in probability-based surveys in France, Germany, Iceland, The Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden (N=17,964). This type of voter bias reinforces existing inequalities, even under equal participation.

From involvement to election. How temporal, financial, and political resources shape young people's political careers

Jana Belschner

Young citizens are under-represented in institutionalized politics – young women in particular. However, we know little about how age and gender intersect in processes of political recruitment and candidate selection. A frequent argument for youth's low share in politics is that they lack experience and other relevant socio-economic and political resources, which makes them both reluctant towards aspiring office and less attractive to choose for political parties. How then does the disposability of temporal, financial, and political resources constrain or favor young male and female aspirants and candidates at the beginning of their political careers? Which youth are selected by political parties aiming to increase their share among elected politicians? The article addresses those questions by analyzing over 700 personal profiles of Irish local politicians and candidates, complemented by 30 qualitative interviews with young party members, local politicians, and party selectors

The Delegate-Trustee Dilemma of Democratic Legitimacy

Troy Broderstad, Sveinung Arnesen, Mikael Johannesson & Jonas Linde

There is a tension between the role of representatives as either trustees or delegates. Should the representatives follow the (changing) opinions of their voters, or should they follow their own convictions? This tension also appears when representatives interpret advisory direct democratic procedures. In this article, we investigate whether they assess referendum results differently from the citizens they are supposed to represent. Previous research has shown that the legitimacy of a majority-rule procedure, as perceived by the general population, is dependent on the turnout, the size of majority, and the favorability of the outcome. To study this form of elite-citizen procedural congruence, we compare a survey sent to all elected representatives in Norway (N=4231) with a probability-based survey of the general population (N=1568). We use an EU membership referendum as a case of majority-rule and run survey experiments on both elected representatives and the population. Our results demonstrate a high degree of elite-citizen congruence, with one exception: The representatives display stronger outcome favorability bias when they are faced with an



unfavorable referendum outcome. These findings have important implications for our understanding of when and how decision-making procedures are implemented and followed.

Why not me? 100 years of Political Selection in the United Kingdom

Julia Cagé & Edgard Dewitte

What have been the drivers of entering politics over the years? And how have they interacted with the questions of political representation? While the theory on the topic is abundant, the evidence is scarce, as historical data on the *unelected* politicians are very often lacking. This paper addresses this issue by building new dataset of biographical informations of almost all candidates at UK General Elections since 1929.

Policy Congruence for All or Negative Partisanship for the Base? What Motivates How Elites Represent Citizens

Mia Costa

Recent scholarship demonstrates that affective polarization is driven by negative partisanship, or a deep-seated hostility and loathing towards opposing partisans. Moreover, contemporary narratives about American politics suggest that many legislators cater to their 'base' who prioritize partisan cheerleading over policy congruence. How do elites weigh the relative value of fulfilling constituents' policy interests, providing good responsiveness via casework, and fueling negative partisanship among a subset of potential voters? Using survey experiments on samples of individuals who have previously run for office or currently hold office, I examine what types of activities political elites prioritize and the consequences of those choices for the quality of representation.

Political Cleavages and Inequality. Evidence from Electoral Democracies, 1950-2018

Amory Gethin, Clara Martínez-Toledan & Thomas Piketty

This paper studies the long-run evolution of political cleavages in old democracies by combining and harmonizing more than one hundred election surveys conducted in twenty countries between 1950 and 2018. In line with Piketty's (2018) findings on France, the United Kingdom and the United States, we document a rise in support for left-wing parties (socialist, social-democratic, communist, green) among voters with higher education in a majority of Western democracies since the 1980s, while top income earners remain significantly more likely to support right-wing parties as in the 1950s-1970s. We interpret these changes as evidence of the emergence of a new cross-cutting dimension of political conflict, partitioning voters on the lines of globalization and new social identities. This transformation in cleavage structures has participated to depoliticizing the class divides which were at the heart of the construction of welfare states in the aftermath of World War II. It can help explain why, in many advanced economies, democratic responses have been insufficient to tackle the rise in income and wealth inequalities.

Who do representatives represent? The Assessment of Public Opinion as a Source of Political Inequality

Andrea Fumarola & Yvette Peters

Democratic governments are generally fairly responsive towards their citizens. At the same time, studies demonstrated that they are not always equally responsive to all citizens: some people are better represented than others. One element in explaining this inequality is



representatives' accurate information about what citizens want. Whether using their own background or citizens' participation as a source to learn about people's preferences, representatives' views may be biased exactly because of who they are or who the participants are. Regardless, the outcome would be that representatives might reflect some citizens' opinions better than others. Here we examine whether representatives' knowledge about their party voters' preferences is correct and unbiased. Using data from the first round of the Panel of Elected Representatives in Norway and matching opinion data from the Norwegian citizen panel, we examine whether legislators' assessments are correct and whether it reflects different groups in society equally. We find that representatives are quite accurate in assessing their voters' preferences, overall. Moreover, we find that legislators reflect preferences of men better than that of women. Further, representatives' own preference strongly predicts their accurateness: the more negative they are about an issue, the more likely they are to underestimate support for it.

What rich and poor consider important and how this matters for representation

Denise Traber, Miriam Hänni, Nathalie Giger and Christian Breunig

Research on unequal representation suggests that governments tend to represent the preferences of the rich better than those of less affluent citizens. We argue that inequality is present already at the agenda-setting stage: if a priority gap between rich and poor exists, governments pay more attention to what the rich consider important in their legislative agenda. We amassed three types of data for our analyses. First, we extract the policy priorities for rich and poor from Eurobarometer data between 2003 and 2015 for 10 European countries and match this information with data on policy outcomes from the Comparative Agendas Project, a focused comparison of three single country studies over longer time series serves as validity test. We conclude that unequal representation occurs already at the very beginning of the policy-making process. This suppression of the priorities of the poor is potentially even more severe than the unequal treatment of preferences.

Unequal responsiveness in Norway? How the rich affect policy outcomes

Ruben Mathisen

The paper investigates differential policy responsiveness to affluent, middle-income and poor citizens in Norway. Using historical survey data of the Norwegian population from 1965 to 2018 on some 600 specific proposed policy changes, combined with data on which of these policy changes were later adopted, I can assess to what extent the preferences of affluent citizens in Norway have a stronger effect on policy than those of the average citizen and the poor. I then compare my results to the findings from similar studies done in the United States and Germany.

Gender balance and political recruitment

Ragnhild Muriaas, Amy Mazur, Season Hoard

This paper is about the effects of schemes that use financing mechanisms to increase gender balance in political recruitment. This is related to the question of inequality as such schemes are developed on the basis that lack of funds is one of the main barriers to women's advancement in politics.



Political Representation and the legitimacy of the political decisions:

The role of internet

Trajche Panov

Accountability of representatives to the represented is the most fundamental requirement of democratic governance (Coleman, 2005). Norms of accountability require the representatives' interests and actions to be open to public scrutiny. Account-giving involves much more than transparency: it calls for views, policies and actions to be explained, contextualized and related to social experience. The Internet can simplify the channels of communication between principles and agents. Representatives feel more pressure to be politically active and inform their voters for the decision-making process. Online political consultations with citizens are becoming important tools that might increase the perception of the legitimacy of political decisions (Coleman, 2005). In this paper, I make use of survey experiments to analyze whether internet can increase or decrease the perception of the legitimacy (i) and fairness (ii) of political decisions. Through the use of the Norwegian Citizen Panel, Wave 15 in 2019, I offer two scenarios. Randomly selected treatment and control groups will be asked to evaluate whether decisions of their representative is more fair and legitimate if they have been consulted by the representative through social media and online consultations (scenario 1) or through town hall meetings and offline consultations (scenario 2). This approach will help me understand the causality of the perception of the legitimacy of political decisions when the internet is used as a channel of communication. The mechanism that will explain variations, besides demographics, is the citizens' understanding of the role of representatives as delegates or trustees.

Descriptive Misrepresentation by Social Class:

Do Voter Preferences Matter?

Reto Wüest and Jonas Pontusson (Geneva)

This paper presents the results of a conjoint survey experiment in which Swiss citizens were asked to choose among parliamentary candidates with different class profiles determined by occupation, education, and income. Existing survey-experimental literature on this topic suggests that respondents are indifferent to the class profiles of candidates or biased against candidates with high-status occupations and high incomes. We find that respondents are biased against upper middle-class candidates, but also against routine working-class candidates. While the bias against upper middle-class candidates is primarily a bias among working-class individuals, the bias against routine working-class candidates is more pronounced among middle-class individuals. We also find that ideological proximity matters greatly to citizen preferences for different candidates. Partisan polarization renders the class profile of candidates less salient to citizens and might be a source of cross-national variation in descriptive misrepresentation by social class.

Interest Groups, Policy Representation and the Legitimacy of Governance

Anne Rasmussen & Stefanie Reher

Effective governance in democratic systems requires that both the policy-making process and its outcomes are regarded as fair by the public. While interest groups are often involved in policy-making at both national and international levels, it is contested whether they strengthen or weaken its legitimacy. On the one hand, consultation of interest groups may lead to more



inclusive, more legitimate and 'better' policy. On the other hand, policy-makers might only consult a selected set of interests that push them to pursue narrow interests, thereby generating public discontent with political decisions. To systematically assess how (biased) interest group involvement affects citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of democratic governance, we conduct survey experiments among representative samples of citizens in the UK, the US, and Germany. The results show that descriptive biases in the types of stakeholders consulted have negative effects on the legitimacy of the policy-making process and its outcomes, in particular when 'special interests' are more involved than 'diffuse interests'. The substantive under-representation of the preferences of a group type can magnify the effect of its descriptive under-representation in the process. Moreover, citizens' trust in and engagement with a type of group can moderate the effects of group involvement on their legitimacy perceptions. The study provides new insights into citizens' preferences over the role of interest groups in democratic governance and highlights the role of individuals' group ties as well as the value of considering both the descriptive and substantive representation of organized interests to understand how they affect the legitimacy of policy-making.

The electoral roots of unequal representation. Party supply and spatial voting in Europe

Jan Rosset & Anna-Sophie Kurella

Economically rooted unequal representation refers to the systematic difference in the extent to which citizens from rich and poor strata of society are able to channel their preferences into political institutions and outcomes. Such inequalities have been documented in a number of Western democracies, but their causes are still debated. This contribution focuses on the role of elections in the process potentially leading to representational inequalities. We specifically analyse two aspects of the electoral process. On the supply side, we focus on citizens' ability to express their policy preferences by looking at the configuration of preferences among citizens and parties. On the demand side, we are interested in the extent to which citizens from different income groups vote in line with their preferences. The empirical analysis relies on the European Social Survey and the Chapel Hill and covers thirteen Western European countries. Our results indicate, first, that the preference structure of poor and rich citizens differs significantly, and second, that party systems in those countries tend to reflect the structure of policy preferences of richer citizens better. This makes it difficult for citizens with lower economic status to voice their preferences in elections. In addition, low income citizens tend to take policy stances of parties less into consideration when making an electoral choice than richer citizens. We argue that both phenomena reinforce each other and are important to understand the roots of unequal representation in Western democracies.