

Proposal
ECPR Joint Session
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Social groups and electoral politics
Group appeals, targeted policy and voter responses

Workshop directors

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Desired workshop format: face-to-face

Standing Group endorsement: Public Opinion & Voting Behavior Standing Group

Outline of Topic

The growing multidimensionality of politics, fragmentation of society and rising number of identities pose new challenges to the study of electoral politics (Dassonneville, 2022). In this context, the role of group politics is becoming increasingly important – both, from the perspective of political actors (supply side) and voters (demand side). The classic literature on political competition and voting has already stressed the importance of group politics, mainly in terms of partisan and social-class identity, voting behavior and electoral campaigns (Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960). However, due to societal processes resulting in weakening ties between specific segments of society and specific parties, the focus of research on electoral politics has shifted towards issue or candidate-based voting. In recent years, though, there has been a revival in the interest in social groups in electoral politics (Achen & Bartels, 2017; Huddy, 2018) indicating that parties tend to target more narrowly defined groups than in the past (Häusermann et al., 2013; Thau, 2019).

Despite this renewed scholarly interest in group politics, we still know surprisingly little about the supply-side of how parties try to address and mobilize social groups as well as about the evolution of the linkages between parties and groups, under consideration of the socially given variety of groups. These linkages need to be examined from both the perspective of appeals in electoral campaign and the use of group-based heuristics by citizens to make sense of this supply (Kam & Kinder, 2012; Redlawsk & Lau, 2013). This workshop examines the linkages between parties and social groups from the perspective of appeals in electoral programs, political speeches or social media, targeted public policy proposals and citizens'

responses to these group appeals. Thereby, it also links to normative debates about the idea that competition between parties (or candidates) representing different social groups, reflected in electoral programs and policies, will improve substantive representation (Dahl, 1971).

With regard to the **supply-side**, the workshop will examine which groups of voters parties address and claim to represent over time. Among others, contributions will investigate whether traditional class alignments persist, whether parties and groups realign along new identity-based lines (Stuckelberger & Tresch, 2022), or whether parties seek to “catch-all” by addressing a wide range of groups (Horn et al., 2020; Somer-Topcu, 2015).

With respect to the **demand-side**, the workshop will study which group-based heuristics voters themselves perceive as relevant, how voters respond to group targeting in electoral campaigns, but also how some groups proactively demand beneficial policy commitments. The workshop seeks in particular to bridge the lack of knowledge on the electoral returns of symbolic appeals and particularistic proposals (Elinder et al., 2015; Robison et al., 2021).

Bringing together scholars in electoral studies, comparative politics, communication, political psychology and political behavior, this workshop will draw on theoretical and empirical innovation to understand the emergence and evolution of social groups and the role of group politics for party competition, voting and representation.

Profile of the Participants and Type of Papers

The workshop targets a wide range of scholars working on party-voter alignments, campaigns, targeting, electoral behavior and group politics. We welcome applications from PhD candidates and early-career researchers as well as established scholars of the field. Alongside the quality of proposals and their fit with the workshop subject, the directors will seek a balance in terms of gender, geographical origin and academic age.

We invite papers that are innovative, theoretically informed, and use cutting-edge qualitative and or quantitative methods (e.g. (semi-)automated text analysis of electoral programs, speeches or social media data, survey experiments or qualitative case studies) to analyze how parties appeal to groups and how groups express demands and react to the electoral supply. We particularly invite comparative perspectives, but also welcome qualitative case studies speaking to the broader debate.

We are looking forward to contributions that tackle the question of group politics from the supply and demand-side as well as those investigating the whole range of socially diverse groups and different kinds of group appeals.

Potential questions to be addressed in papers investigating the **supply-side** might be:

- To what extent do parties address groups explicitly or implicitly, with particularistic proposals or with rhetoric or more symbolic appeals?
- How do parties combine policy issues and group appeals?

- When and why do parties negatively address certain kinds of voters?
- Does the rise of social media contribute to transform practices of targeting? Are groups addressed differently, reflecting, for instance their level of resources or perceived deservingness? Does this vary according to contextual factors such as the electoral system, polarization or campaign funding regulations?

With respect to the **demand-side**, we welcome papers that ask:

- Do voters' responses to group targeting vary depending on how (e.g., symbolically, negatively or positively) campaigns address their in-group or other groups? And what is the role of individual group identification?
- How do voters react to incumbents' past targeted policies (retrospective voting)?

We are also interested, more broadly, in potential consequences on political attitudes, feeling of being represented or the salience of identities. Eventually, the workshop seeks to shed light on the interplay between the demand- and supply-side, considering how citizens react to parties and their supply, but also the other way around.

Regarding the **range of groups**, we explicitly welcome contributions dealing with group appeals more broadly as well as with appeals to specific groups (e.g., women, the youth, the poor, rural population). We also invite papers that focus on multiple, overlapping and potentially intersecting group identities and the impact of these group-based cross-pressures on voters' responses. In addition, we are interested in different **natures of group appeals (symbolic/particularistic, positive/negative,...)**. We explicitly not only invite contributions that look at how voters respond to appeals benefitting them or groups they perceive as deserving, but also at voters' reactions to negative (out-)group targeting. Finally, we are also looking forward to **conceptual contributions** from a theoretical and empirical perspective reflecting on how group appeals and targets can be defined and measured.

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