

Week 9  
Voters' Party Perceptions and Representation

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Let's start taking a survey:

<https://forms.gle/Li1YgSjnj9HkhAh16>

- ▶ Parties' policy positions  $\longleftrightarrow$  Voters' policy preferences.
- ▶ What voters want from political parties?

According to the Responsible Party Model (Ranney 1954), four conditions allow citizens to control leaders:

1. Policy offering: Each party offers a unique program (or platform) consistent with its policy stands;
2. Candidates run for election on the basis of their party's platforms;
3. Policy preferences: Voters cast ballots and choose parties based on the party program that most clearly reflects their own preferences;
4. Promise keeping: Each party should ensure that its elected officials promote and vote for its program once in government.
5. Voters hold the governing party accountable for policy outcomes.

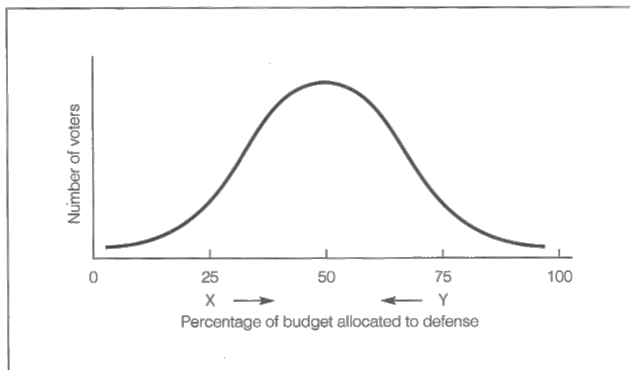
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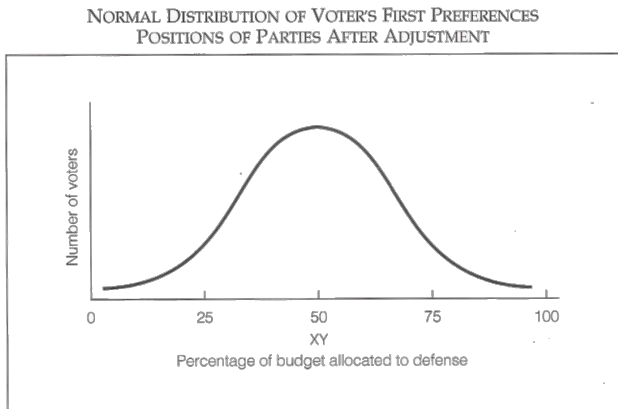
What are the similarities and differences between this model and the Downsian spatial model of party competition we learned on week 6?

What should political parties do if the distribution of voters' preferences follows a normal distribution?

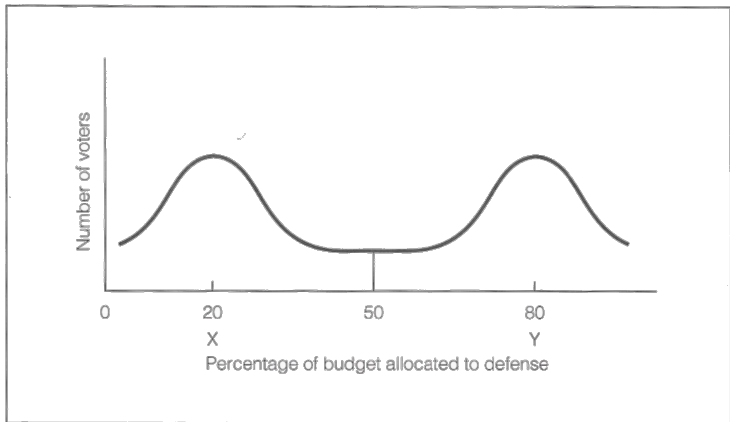
NORMAL DISTRIBUTION OF VOTERS' FIRST PREFERENCES  
INITIAL POSITIONS OF PARTIES X AND Y



They should adjust their positions moving to the center of the scale.

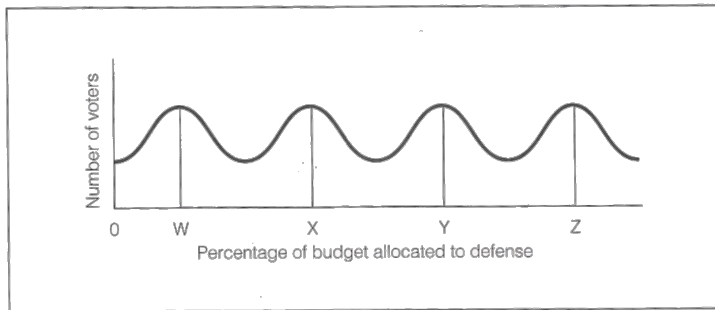


## BIMODAL DISTRIBUTION OF VOTERS' FIRST PREFERENCES

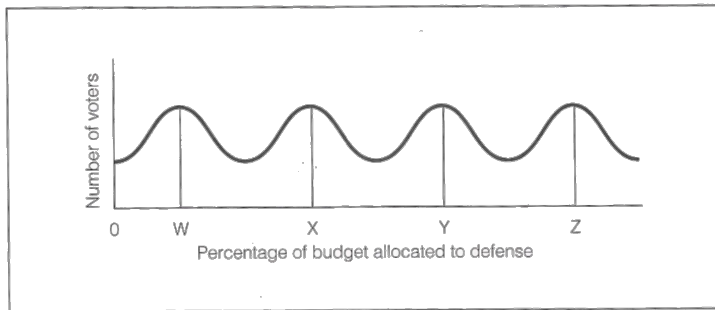




## MULTIMODAL DISTRIBUTION OF VOTERS' FIRST PREFERENCES



## MULTIMODAL DISTRIBUTION OF VOTERS' FIRST PREFERENCES



Let's now relax the assumption that voters' preferences are fixed, and derive some predictions on how political parties react to changes in voters' preferences.

## Do parties change their positions in response to public opinion shifts?

*Answer:* Consistent empirical support (Adams et al 2004, 2006; Ezrow et al. 2011).

**Table 1.** Explaining parties' policy shifts

	Country-specific effects (1)	Party-specific effects (2)	Past election results (3)	Party moderation (4)	Fully-specified model (5)	Public opinion model (6)	Party supporter model (7)
Mean shift – all voters (t)	<b>0.38**</b> (0.05)	<b>0.33*</b> (0.17)	<b>0.38**</b> (0.18)	<b>0.38**</b> (0.18)	<b>0.38**</b> (0.18)	<b>0.34*</b> (0.18)	
Mean shift – party supporters (t)	-0.07 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)		-0.04 (0.08)
Niche × mean shift – all voters (t)	-0.27 (0.35)	-0.34 (0.35)	-0.28 (0.35)	-0.27 (0.35)	-0.37 (0.17)	-0.23 (0.35)	
Niche × mean shift – party supporters (t)	<b>0.38**</b> (0.17)	<b>0.29*</b> (0.17)	<b>0.37**</b> (0.17)	<b>0.38**</b> (0.17)	<b>0.37**</b> (0.17)		<b>0.33**</b> (0.17)
Niche	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.08)
Change in party position (t – 1)	-0.43*** (0.05)	-0.42*** (0.05)	-0.44*** (0.05)	-0.44*** (0.05)	-0.44*** (1.00)	-0.44*** (0.05)	-0.44*** (0.05)
Change in party position (t – 1) × vote change (t – 1)			0.001** (0.000)		0.001** (0.000)		
Vote change (t – 1)			-0.010* (0.006)		-0.010* (0.006)		
Party ideology				0.008 (0.036)	0.004 (0.035)		
Intercept	7.98** (0.29)	7.87** (0.29)	7.99** (0.29)	7.98** (0.30)	7.99** (0.29)	8.02*** (0.30)	7.99** (0.30)
N	309	309	309	309	309	309	309
R <sup>2</sup>	0.19	0.19	0.20	0.19	0.20	0.18	0.18

\*p < 0.10, \*\*p < 0.05, \*\*\*p < 0.01, two-tailed tests. Standard errors are given in parentheses. The dependent variable is the change in a party's Left-Right policy position based on the codings of parties' policy programmes that are reported in the CD-ROM in Budge et al. (2001) and Klingemann et al. (2006). The definitions of the independent variables are given in the text. Column 2 estimates the parameters of a random-effects model specification (see note 15). The country-specific intercepts for columns 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are available upon request.

*Source:* Ezrow et al (2011).

## Do parties shift their left-right positions in response to past election results?

*Answer:* Inconsistent results: Empirical support (Budge 1994, 2010) and weak or inconsistent results (Adams et al. 2004, 2009; Ezrow et al. 2011).

TABLE 2 *Explaining Parties' Ideological Shifts*

Explanatory variable	Basic	Country-specific intercepts†	Gabel-Huber data‡	Voter dispersion effects
Intercept	0.11* (0.05)	0.11* (0.05)	0.04 (0.18)	0.11* (0.05)
<i>Harmful public opinion shift</i>	0.80** (0.29)	0.86** (0.30)	0.88* (0.43)	0.82** (0.29)
<i>Benign public opinion shift</i>	0.19 (0.23)	0.22 (0.25)	0.10 (0.35)	0.19 (0.23)
<i>Past election results</i>	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Party's ideological shift ( $t - 1$ )	-0.49** (0.08)	-0.51** (0.08)	-0.44** (0.12)	-0.49** (0.08)
Party's ideological shift ( $t - 2$ )	-0.20* (0.08)	-0.23** (0.08)	-0.25* (0.12)	-0.22** (0.08)
Change in voter dispersion				0.87* (0.36)
Number of cases	167	167	109	167
Adjusted $R^2$	0.21	0.21	0.20	0.24

*Notes:* For these analyses the dependent variable was the party's ideological shift between election  $t - 1$  and election  $t$  (the current election), based on the CMP codings of parties' left-right positions. The specifications used to estimate the parameters reported in columns 1-4 are given by Equations 1-2 in the text.

\*  $P \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $P \leq 0.01$ , two-tailed test.

*Source:* Adams et al (2004).

## Do parties shift their left-right positions in response to policy shifts by rival parties?

*Answer:* Empirical support (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009).

TABLE 2 *Statistical Analyses of Parties' Ideological Shifts*

	Party Dynamics Model (1)	Fully-Specified Model (2)	Past Election Results Model (3)	Niche Parties Model (4)
<i>Intercept</i>	0.049 (0.379)	0.035 (0.380)	0.038 (0.377)	-0.085 (0.377)
<i>Policy shift (t - 1)</i>	-0.360*** (0.030)	-0.355*** (0.030)	-0.350*** (0.030)	-0.352*** (0.030)
<i>Public opinion shift (t)</i>	0.480*** (0.030)	0.479*** (0.030)	0.480*** (0.030)	0.511*** (0.031)
<i>Average shift - other parties (t - 1)</i>	<b>0.196*** (0.044)</b>	<b>0.150*** (0.047)</b>	<b>0.153*** (0.046)</b>	<b>0.149*** (0.046)</b>
<i>Average shift - family members (t - 1)</i>		<b>0.096** (0.045)</b>	<b>0.094** (0.045)</b>	<b>0.089** (0.045)</b>
<i>Vote change (t - 1)</i>			0.046 (0.104)	
<i>Vote change (t - 1) × party shift (t - 1)</i>			0.010* (0.006)	
<i>Niche party</i>				0.831 (1.18)
<i>Public opinion shift (t) × Niche party</i>				-0.208*** (0.078)
Adjusted $R^2$	0.287	0.290	0.292	0.293

*Notes:* For these analyses the dependent variable was the party's ideological shift between the previous election and the current election, based on the CMP codings of the parties' left-right positions. See the text for definitions of the independent variables. The specifications used to estimate the parameters of the Party Dynamics Model and the Fully-Specified Model are given by Equations (1) and (2) in the text, respectively.  $N = 1,469$ . \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \* $p \leq 0.10$ , two-tailed tests.

*Source:* Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009).

The consequences of party policy shifts on voter behavior

## Do voters perceive party policy shifts?

*Answer:* No empirical support (Adams et al. 2011a).

**TABLE 2** The Relationship between Changes in the Left-Right Orientations of Party Manifestos and Shifts in Voters' Perceptions of Party Positions ( $N = 97$ )

	Basic Model (1)	Country- Specific Intercepts (2)
<i>Party j's stated Left-Right shift (t)</i>	.039 (.089)	.047 (.089)
<i>Party j's stated Left-Right shift (t - 1)</i>	.100 (.074)	.103 (.074)
<i>Party j's perceived Left-Right shift (t - 1)</i>	.046 (.144)	.032 (.136)
Britain		.157 (.344)
Germany		.107 (.288)
Norway		-.031 (.132)
Sweden		.068 (.125)
Intercept	-.017 (.046)	-.051 (.119)
Adjusted $R^2$	.02	.04

\*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests.

*Notes:* Standard errors are in parentheses. For these analyses the dependent variable was the change in voters' perceptions of the party's Left-Right position at the current election compared to the previous election, based on respondents' party placements from National Election Study data from Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden (see the appendix for the complete list of elections and parties included in the data set). The independent variables are defined in the text. In column 2 the baseline country is the Netherlands.

*Source:* Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu (2011a).

The empirical evidence suggests the following puzzle (Adams 2012):

- ▶ There is extensive evidence that political parties in multiparty systems consistently adjust their policy promises in response to shifts in citizens' policy preferences, to shifts in rival parties' policy positions, and to past election results, but...
- ▶ There is only weak and inconsistent empirical evidence that citizens in multiparty systems systematically react to parties' policy shifts.



Possible explanations to the puzzle:

1. Rank-and-file voters are often inattentive to politics and thus are largely oblivious when parties shift their left-right positions.
2. Rank-and-file voters update their perceptions of parties' policy positions based on parties' actions, but not based on changes in parties' policy statements and programs.
3. Voters do respond to shifts in party elites' policy statements, but that political parties tend to step on their own message because different party members issue contradictory or confusing policy statements that undercut the effect of the carefully crafted, authoritative policy statements the parties present in their manifestos.

Werner, Annika. 2019. "What voters want from their parties: Testing the promise-keeping assumption." *Electoral Studies* 57: 186–195.

1. Do voters value parties keeping promises?
2. Do voters prefer their own party to keep promises more than they prefer other parties to keep their promises?

### Assumptions in the political representation literature:

- ▶ Voters prefer parties to fulfill the promises of their election campaigns
- ▶ with higher preference for promise-keeping placed on the party a voter supports.

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Lack of evidence supporting that voters agree with the normative assumption that voters prefer parties to fulfill the promises of their election campaigns.

## Alternatives to promise-keeping?

- ▶ Non-democratic option:
  - ▶ Arbitrary rule by free agents.
- ▶ Democratic options:
  - ▶ Imperative mandate: Parties fulfill promises from their electoral program.
  - ▶ ‘Anticipatory democracy’ (Mansbridge 2003): Parties adapt their policies following changes in the public opinion.
  - ▶ Trustee model of representation (Pitkin 1967, Burke): Parties pursue an idea of “common good,” making decisions on the basis of policy experts’ advice.

1. Voters prefer parties to keep their promises over following public opinion or expert advice.

Based on previous studies, another hypothesis is suggested:

2. Voters care more about their own party keeping its promises than about other parties keeping their promises.

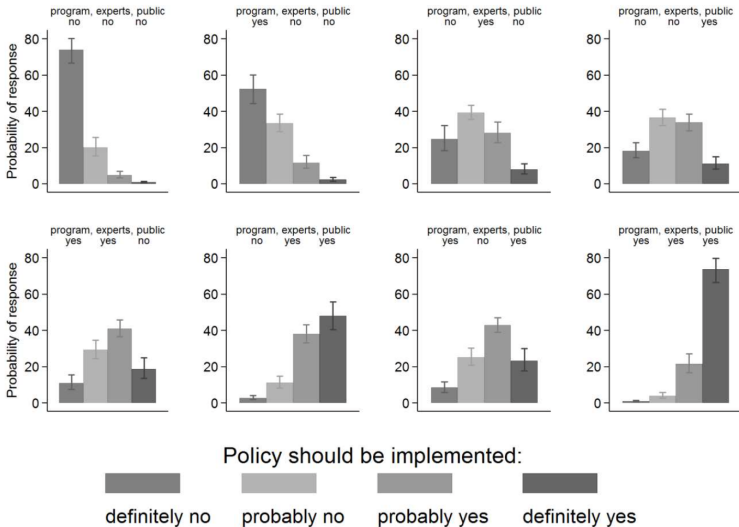
- ▶ Conjoint survey experiment;
- ▶ Australian voters in October 2016.

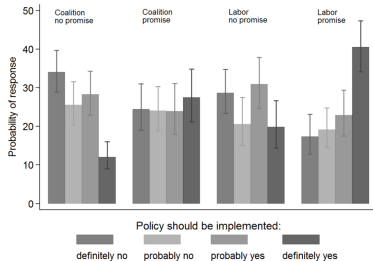
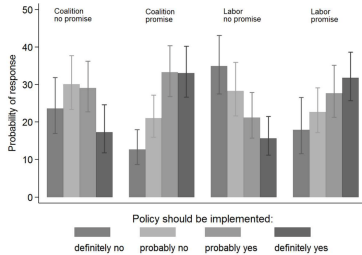
*Dependent variable:* The respondents' judgment on whether a policy should be implemented, running from 1 (definitely not) to 4 (definitely yes).

*Independent variables:* Two sets of experimental factors:

- (a) the binary outcome for the three representative mechanisms (promise-keeping, public opinion, expert advice), and;
- (b) the decision-making party (Coalition vs. Labor) in combination with the respondent's preferred party.







- ▶ Australian respondents care considerably less whether a policy fulfills an election promise than whether it falls in line with public opinion or expert advice on what is best for the common good.
- ▶ Respondents' attitudes towards promise-keeping do not change depending on which party is making decisions about the policy.

- ▶ The findings challenge assumptions of the party representation literature about how voters want party government and representative democracy to function.
- ▶ Impact on our understanding of democracy in general.

Focus on coalition governments.

### Coalition Government

A government formed jointly by more than one political party. Parties usually decide to form a coalition government when no political party alone holds an absolute majority in the legislative power (e.g., congress or parliament).

Some features of a coalition government:

**Ministerial responsibility** refers to the constitutional doctrine by which cabinet ministers must bear ultimate responsibility for what happens in their ministry.

**Collective cabinet responsibility** refers to the doctrine by which ministers must publicly support collective cabinet decisions or resign.

**Voters do not like coalition compromise and cabinet parties are therefore incentivized to squabble with one another to fight off perceptions of compromise**

According to Fortunato (2021), there are two central risks to coalition compromise for governing parties:

1. Voters may observe the process of compromise or the outcome of that process and perceive that their preferred party has been taken advantage of or failed to put up enough of a fight.
2. Coalition compromise tarnish the policy brand of governing parties.

How do parties squabble with one another to fight off perceptions of compromise?

**Legislative review** during the period between a bill's submission and its final passage provides a temporary, and targeted, respite from collective responsibility in which cabinet partners are free to openly air their policy disagreements.

Future Research



► **Thursday, 12 May.**

*Week 10. Compulsory Voting*

Compulsory readings:

- Panagopoulos, Costas. 2008. “The calculus of voting in compulsory voting systems.” *Political Behavior* 30 (4): 455–467.
- Sheppard, Jill. 2015. “Compulsory voting and political knowledge: Testing a ‘compelled engagement’ hypothesis.” *Electoral Studies* 40: 300–307.
- Singh, Shane P. 2021. “The Consequences of Compulsory Voting.” Chap. 2 in *Beyond Turnout: How Compulsory Voting Shapes Citizens and Political Parties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 38–56.