

Proposed Workshop for the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops  
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## **Issue Congruence and Policy Responsiveness in European Governance**

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This workshop proposal is endorsed by the ECPR Standing Group on *Voting Behaviour and Public Opinion in a Comparative Perspective*.

### **Subject Area:**

Democratic deficit, issue congruence, party democracy, political responsiveness, accountability, public opinion, legislative decision-making, and democratic governance in multi-level system.

### **Abstract**

This workshop plans to study the quality of democracy in Europe, focusing on issue congruence and political responsiveness across countries, levels of governance, policy areas and time, both at the national and the European levels. Two questions have come to the fore in recent studies regarding political representation: one relates to issue congruence – how close a match there is between the wishes of voters and the policies enacted by governments. The other question relates to political responsiveness – the extent to which changes in political demands lead to changes in policy outputs. Existing research on issue congruence and party democracy in Europe has mainly concerned itself with national government policy-making and representation, especially in Anglo-American democracies. There is much need for additional studies that focus on continental European countries. Regarding the EU level, there has been some work on policy programmes, demonstrating that voters and party elites are broadly in agreement regarding European integration in general; but this work suggests clear divergence when it comes to specific policy areas. Moreover there has been virtually no discussion of the interplay between representation at the European and national levels within the EU. What is needed is a systematic examination of how issue congruence is linked to political responsiveness across countries, levels of governance, policy areas and time. By bringing together scholars from diverse research communities, this workshop would provide a unique opportunity for a critical discussion of these themes in terms of theoretical approaches, data availability, and methodological techniques.

## **Issue Congruence and Policy Responsiveness in European Governance**

Democratic theory tells us that in a representative democracy there should be some congruence between the interests of citizens and the policy positions of their representatives. Two questions have come to the forefront in studies regarding political representation: one relates to issue congruence and party democracy, that is, how close a match there is between the wishes of voters and the policies proposed (and perhaps enacted) by political parties. The other question relates to political responsiveness, that is, how policy outputs change with changes in public opinion. Existing research on issue congruence and party democracy in Europe has mainly focused on national government policy-making and representation (Hobolt and Kjemmen 2008); but there is some work on EU policy-making (Mair and Thomassen 2010) which has demonstrated that voters and party elites are broadly in line regarding European integration (Eijk and Franklin 1991, Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2007), but yet clearly diverge when it comes to specific policy areas (Hooghe 2003). Research on political responsiveness suggests that EU legislative outputs are strongly related to public opinion (Franklin and Wlezien 1997) with variation across policy areas (Arnold and Franklin 2006). Nevertheless, there has been virtually no discussion of the interplay between representation at the European and national levels within the EU. What is missing is a systematic examination of issue congruence and policy responsiveness across countries, levels of governance, policy areas, and time.

The aim of this panel is to evaluate problems and possibilities of political representation in the multi-level system of governance in Europe. This is done by focusing on issue congruence, party democracy, and political responsiveness both at the national and the European level. By bringing together scholars from diverse research communities, this workshop provides a unique opportunity for a critical discussion of political representation, data available for assessing the connections involved, and methodological approaches.

### **Outline of Topic**

The goal of this workshop is to examine political representation in decision-making across policy areas and time (nationally and at the EU-level) by assessing the congruence and responsiveness found between public 'demands' and policy 'supply.' Issue congruence and responsiveness is mutual, involving two aspects. One aspect is the influence of public support on political parties and policy-makers: Do political parties take policy positions in line with voters' preferences? Do the productions of European institutions reflect the evolving wishes of the European public(s)? A second aspect is the degree to which European publics appear to be aware of party positions and legislation: Do voters align their policy preferences with cueing strategies of parties? Is there public responsiveness to the legislative activities of national and European institutions?

The workshop directors feel that a workshop on issue congruence, party democracy and political responsiveness across countries, levels of governance, policy areas and time will lead to synergies between diverse research communities: between scholars who are studying electoral representation, party government, political behavior, and national and European experts of legislative decision-making. By bringing together scholars from these diverse research communities, this workshop promises to break new ground on the dynamics of political representation in a multi-level system of governance. Such a workshop has not been organized before at any of the ECPR sessions and as such would provide a much needed academic forum for critical discussion and reflection.

### **Relation to Existing Research**

This workshop relates directly to two bodies of scholarly work: party democracy and models of responsiveness. Research on party democracy has focused on the dyadic correspondence between electors and elected regarding the issue of European integration and specific policy areas both on the national and the EU level. This research has provided insight into the conditions for issue congruence (Mattila and Raunio 2006) as well as the differences in congruence across policy areas (Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). However, much of this work lacks a comparative perspective across time.

Existing literature on the correspondence between public opinion and policy behaviour is based on the thermostat model of responsiveness (Wlezien 1995). Empirical analysis of this model in European decision-making has predominately been on single countries (Wlezien and Soroka 2005) or on a few countries comparatively (Binzer Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005, 2008). Despite a large body of research on European public opinion, empirical research on the EU focusing on the nexus between public opinion and European public policy is almost non-existent (Arnold and Franklin 2006, Carrubba 2002, Franklin and Wlezien 1997, Soroka and Wlezien 2009, Toshkov 2009).

The workshop includes but is not limited to the following topics for discussion and analysis:

- Theoretical analyses of issue congruence, party democracy and political responsiveness.
- Analysis of degree of issue congruence between voters and party positions regarding policy preferences in Europe.
- Analysis of degree of responsiveness of national and European institutions to public opinion.
- Analysis of quality and degree of responsiveness of public opinion to public policy.
- Methodological reflection on appropriate aggregation of connections between constituency, citizenry and legislatures.

### **Participants**

We seek contributions both from established and emerging scholars. Additionally, we would welcome the participation of practitioners both from national and European institutions.

**Types of Paper**

The workshop welcomes theoretical, empirical and methodological papers. Theoretical papers should present fresh approaches or synthesize existing literature. Empirical papers should be theory-guided and advance understanding by providing detailed evidence. Methodological papers should critically examine existing techniques or develop new ones. The workshop hopes to see a spectrum of data and research designs (qualitative / quantitative, and single case studies / large-N analyses).

**Funding**

Applications will be made to the Research Council of the European University Institute and to the Dutch NWO for financial support.

**Biographical Note**

Christine Arnold is Assistant Professor at the University of Maastricht, the Netherlands. Her teaching and research interests are in comparative politics, public opinion, and research methods. Some of her work has been published in *European Union Politics*, *Political Studies*, *Journal of Contemporary European Research* and several book chapters.

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