



State Interests vs Citizens' Preferences: On which Side do (Labour) Parties Stand?

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Abstract

This dissertation deals with the question of how the partisan nature of government still matters in the current globalized and post-industrial world. In particular, it compares the representativeness of two contemporary centre-left governments with that of two centre-left executives from the 1970s in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. According to the more provocative theories about the state of contemporary representative democracy, these countries should be forerunners of a general European trend in which governments care more about technical competence rather than political representation and responsiveness. These tendencies are expected to particularly affect the partisanship of Labour ministers.

In order to test these theories, I do a comparative content analysis of how Labour finance ministers/Chancellors justify the yearly government budget in front of the parliament. The justifications are divided into those that characterize the government as representative of the partisan redistributive preferences (input-justifications) VS those that profile it as a competent caretaker of public finances (output-justifications). Following the above-mentioned theories, the hypothesis is that today the output-justifications are more important than in the past.

As this approach is relatively novel with regards to the study of responsiveness, the thesis also dedicates one chapter to the justification strategies of a technical and a neoliberal government. The purpose of this extra comparison is to have more empirical evidence of what renders an output-justification different from an input-justification. By incorporating these two cases, thus, I get a deeper comparative insight into what is a typical left-wing/partisan discourse characteristic and what constitutes governmental/institutional talk. This extra comparison, consequently, allows me to reflect more deeply on the findings emerging from the overtime comparison of Labour governments.

The findings of my research tell a two-sided story. On the one hand, contrary to my hypothesis, the contemporary cases feature slightly more input-justifications than the governments from the 1970s. On the other, the logic of the discourses suggests that, while in the 1970s the responsiveness to social needs was presented as a policy goal per se, today the input-justifications tend to be more subordinated to justifications about economic and financial considerations. The findings thus speak both to theories according to which today we are not witnessing a decline of political

representation, but simply a change in kind, as well to the theories speaking of a gradual hollowing out of political competition. In the conclusion of my dissertation I reflect on what is right and wrong on the two sides of the debate.



Jury: Maurits van der Veen (College of William & Mary), Hanspeter Kriesi (EUI, Co-Supervisor), Johannes Karremans (Candidate), Pepper Culpepper (formerly EUI/University of Oxford, Supervisor), Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, by videolink)

Bio

Johannes (Jan) Karremans is a researcher in comparative politics. The Responsive-Responsible dilemma of party-government constitutes Jan's main research focus; with his dissertation he proposes a new way of studying this issue by looking at the arguments with which governments justify their national budgets.

Besides his doctoral research, he works at Hanspeter Kriesi's *POLCON* project at the EUI, for which he has been collecting data and is co-authoring a chapter on political competition in Italy.

Jan holds MA and BA degrees from the Vrije Universiteit, Brussels (2011-2012) and the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam (2008-2011).