Evaluating voters' attitudes towards intra-party deliberation using a survey experiment

Zachary Greene and Lauren Toner
University of Strathclyde

Pre-analysis plan
15/12/2021

1. Study Information

In recent decades, many political parties in Western democracies display a preference for inclusive decision-making by way of reforming their leadership selection rules (Cross and Blais, 2012). Reforms towards increased participation not only have implications for internal party actors and thus, party dynamics (Rahat and Hazan, 2001), but likely also influence perceptions of the party as a whole among the wider electorate. Scholars find that voters report greater satisfaction with democracy shortly after the parties they support implement reforms that foster inclusivity in the electoral candidate selection process (Shomer et al., 2016). Though the position of party leader and the method by which they are chosen, hold different implications for the party than that of electoral candidates, we expect that voters' appreciation for increased involvement translates to this process. Under what conditions, voters' support for inclusion and transparency, however, is yet to be explored.. Both inclusion and transparency can produce unintended consequences for parties' electoral strategies and success. For example, wider selectorates, or those parties that allow for more actors to participate in the leadership selectin process, increase the risk of party instability with consequences such as ignorance of the winner to certain internal factions (Rahat and Hazan, 2001) and loss of support from the losing faction (Cross and Pruysers, 2019). In this study, we consider voters perceptions of the process when confronted with a set of potential implications of intra-party reforms. Given the ability of intra-party decision-making to influence parties' policy outcomes, their representativeness and electoral success (e.g. Greene and Haber 2015; Lin and Lehrer 2019; Cozza and Somer-Topcu 2021), we argue that support for reforms intended to incorporate more actors in the intra-party selectin process will be conditional on the consequences of the reform. Considering a set of trade-offs, we plan to carry out a survey experiment to answer the question, 'is inclusion in the leadership selection process more important for voters' perceptions of political parties and democracy than the consequences of inclusion?' This study will contribute to an emerging literature that seeks to understand how voter attitudes at the party level impact attitudes towards the wider system (e.g. Close et al., 2017; Shomer et al., 2017) and has specific implications for theories of representation (Aldrich, 2011; Kölln 2015).

2. Study Design

2.1 Experiments

Our design contains three experimental treatments and is intended to identify each element of leadership selection that could shape voters' attitudes using a vignette that varies 1) the number of people eligible to participate in the leadership selection 2) the repercussions of the reform on consensus between the leadership and their party 3) groups within the party. Participants will be randomly assigned to a control group or varying levels of each treatment. We will also include a control vignette only stating that the major political parties are considering reforms to their rules for selecting the party's leadership, but offering no additional information.

The primary vignette reads as follows:

"The major political parties in the United Kingdom are considering reforms to their rules for selecting the party's leadership. The proposed reforms would [increase/decrease] the number of people that participate in the final vote for the leadership. These reforms are predicted to [increase/decrease] leaders' policy agreements with the party's [members of parliament/activists/ voters]."

The control vignette reads as follows:
"The major political parties in the United Kingdom are considering reforms to their rules for selecting the party's leadership."

1. Do you support reforms for future party leadership elections?

   Five-point scale from "Definitely yes" to "Definitely no"

2. How satisfied are you with the state of democracy in the UK?

   Five-point scale from "Completely satisfied" to "Completely dissatisfied"

Participants will also answer a series of questions concerning their attitudes towards political parties in the UK as well as a set of demographic questions. A quality check question relating to the vignettes will also be included to ensure all responses are reliable. Those failing this attention check will be removed from the sample.

2.2 Sample size

We plan to field the experiment using a sample of UK voters. A representative sample of ~1,500 will be sourced by Qualtrics from across the UK. If greater than 10% of respondents fail the attention check, we will return the survey to the field with

identical question wording to increase our sample size to a total figure closer to 1,500 quality respondents.

2.3 Data collection and timeline

We will use the Prolific online panel to recruit a representative sample of UK based respondents. We expect data collection to take place between December 2021 - January 2022.

3. Hypotheses

Participation

Hypothesis 1a:
Respondents will be more/less likely to support leadership election reform in the future where the reform enables an increased/decreased number of voters

Hypothesis 1b:
Respondents will report higher/lower levels of satisfaction with democracy where the reform enables an increased/decreased number of voters

Consensus within the party

Hypothesis 2a:

Respondents will be more/less likely to support leadership election reform in the future where the reform encouraged increased/decreased intra-party agreement.

Hypothesis 2b:
Respondents will be report higher/lower levels of satisfaction with democracy where the reform encouraged increased/decreased intra-party agreement.

Hypothesis 2c:
Respondents will perceive the parties as more unified/divided on issues when the leadership election reform encouraged a number of agreements/conflicts between party groups.

Groups within the party

Hypothesis 3a:
The effect of increased/decreased agreement between the leadership and the party's voters on support for leadership selection reforms will be greater than for party activists or members of parliament.

Hypothesis 3b:

The effect of increased/decreased agreement between the leadership and the party's voters on satisfaction with democracy will be greater than for party activists of members of parliament.

Hypothesis 3a:
The effect of increased/decreased agreement between the leadership and the party's voters on support for leadership selection reforms will be greater than for party activists or members of parliament.

Partisan Identifiers

Hypothesis 4a:
Supporters of a party will be more/less supportive of leadership reforms that increase/decrease agreements between party leaders and party activists and members of parliament.

Hypothesis 4b:
Supporters of a party will be more/less satisfied with democracy following reforms that increase/decrease agreements between party leaders and party activists and members of parliament.

4. Analysis

4.1 Operationalisation of variables

- Each of the treatments will be coded as a set of binary variables dependent on which vignette respondents received. In each case the analysis will compare effect of the treatments relative to the other outcomes for the three treatment areas, as well as respondents in the control group.
- The two dependent variables will be coded as ordinal variables. Brant tests will be used to determine the suitability of these variables for analysis using either binary or ordinal operationalisations.
- The primary analysis will consist of simple difference of means tests and a multivariate logistic regression (either binary or ordinal, dependent on the outcome of the Brant tests).
- Further analysis considering the impact of party identification and ideological proximity as moderating variables will evaluate the extent to which the effects are driven by those more closely affiliated with a party or more independent respondents.
- A follow up analysis will use the party unity measures as the dependent variable as plausibility check with previous analyses (e.g. Greene and Haber 2015; Lin and Lehrer 2020).

4.3 Additional variables of interest

- Political ideology will be coded on a 10-point interval scale
- Perceptions of political party ideology will be coded on a 10-point interval scale
- Most important political issues facing the UK will be coded on a 6-point ordinal scale
- Voting intention will be coded categorically
- Feelings of representation of party voted for will be coded on a 5-point ordinal scale
- Perceptions of party competence will be coded on a 5-point ordinal scale
- Perceptions of party unity will be coded on a 10-point interval scale

4.2 Control variables

We will control for standard demographic variables and self-reported political preferences and characteristics.

5. Ethics

This experiment has received ethical clearance from the University of Strathclyde's Ethics Committee. Participants will be informed that they are under no obligation to participate or complete the survey and data will be completely anonymised. The investigators will not have access to the identities or information that would easily be linked to the identity of individual participants. The survey responses will be collected and collated by Qualtrics, a well-known survey company that is commonly used for surveys in political science. No risks have been identified in participants responding to this survey.

6. Bibliography

Aldrich, JH. 2011.*Why Parties?: A Second Look*. ed. Chicago University Press. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Close, Caroline, Camille Kelbel, and Emilie van Haute. 2017. "What Citizens Want in Terms of Intra-Party Democracy: Popular Attitudes towards Alternative Candidate Selection Procedures." *Political Studies,* 65(3): 646–64.

Cross, W. and Blais, A. 2012. "Who selects the party leader?"*, Party Politics*, 18(2): 127-150.

Greene, Zachary and Matthias Haber. 2015. "The consequences of appearing divided: An analysis of party evaluations and vote choice." *Electoral Studies, 37*: 15-27.

Kölln, Ann-Kristin. 2015. "The Value of Political Parties to Representative Democracy." *European Political Science Review,* 7(4): 593–613.

Lin, Nick and Lehrer, Roni. 2020. “Everything to everyone and the conditioning effect of intraparty cohesion: A replication in a cross-national context.” *Party Politics*, p.1354068820918780.

Rahat, G. and Hazan, R. 2001. “Candidate selection methods: an analytical Framework”, *Party Politics*, 7: 297–322.

Shomer, Yael, Gert Jan Put, and Einat Gedalya-Lavy. 2016. “Intra-Party Politics and Public Opinion: How Candidate Selection Processes Affect Citizens’ Satisfaction with Democracy.” *Political Behavior*, 38(3): 509–34.