Do Politicians Outside the United States Also Think Voters are More Conservative than they Really Are? A Comparative Study of the Conservative Bias in Elites' Perception of Public Opinion

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Survey methodology and survey questions

This document presents the survey method implemented for collecting the data used in the study, the variables used in the study (in relation to the dataset made available for replication purposes), and the exact wording of the survey questions used.

1. Survey method

The data used in this study is based upon a survey of members of parliament (MPs) from Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia-Brussels separately[1]), Canada, Germany and Switzerland. In each country, *national* MPs were surveyed between March 2018 and September 2019. In Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, we also surveyed *regional* MPs.[2]

In Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, *all* MPs from the targeted populations were invited to participate in the study. In Germany, a slightly different procedure was followed because of the large size of the German Bundestag (19th legislative period), which consists of 709 members. A stratified sampling procedure was used, and groups of politicians were contacted in several rounds (511 contact attempts in total).

Politicians completed a questionnaire on a computer brought by the interviewer who was present in the room, so we are sure that politicians themselves answered the questions and

[1] We treat the two major parts of Belgium—the Dutch-speaking part (region Flanders) and the French-speaking part (region Wallonia)—as two distinct political systems. This makes sense because they have entirely separate party systems with Dutch-speaking parties competing only in Flanders and the French-speaking parties competing only in Wallonia. Also the media system is fully distinct, and public opinions are divergent (see e.g. Deschouwer, 2009). A third region (region Brussels, the bilingual capital) has mostly Francophone representatives but also some Dutch-speaking ones. We only interviewed French-speaking MPs in Brussels, however, and treated them as part of the French-speaking system. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to 'Flanders' and 'Wallonia'.

[2] In contrast to many other countries, ministers in Belgium are not members of parliament. The vast majority of them are elected in parliament but once they are appointed in government, they are temporarily replaced by a substitute as long as they sit in government. Yet, since they are initially elected MPs, we also include them in our study.

not their staffers. The interviewer did not observe the answers, though, to lessen politicians' feeling of being monitored.

Table A1.1 below reports the number of estimations of public opinion (for general public opinion, electoral district opinion and party electorate opinion) for the full POLPOP survey of politicians, and specifies the number of politicians included in the analysis for the Letter.

Table A1.1: Number of politicians and estimations per type of public opinion

	General public opinion (Belgium, Canada and Germany)	**Electoral district opinion (Switzerland)**	**Party electorate opinion (All countries)**
Total number of politicians interviewed	498	368	866
Total number estimations made by politicians	**3,863**	**2,796**	**6,660**
Total number of politicians' interviews used in the Letter	483	368	851
Total number estimations made by politicians and used in the Letter	**1,492**	**899**	**2,391**

2. Variables used (see dataset on APSR dataverse)

V2: Country**:**

1: Flanders
2: Francophone Belgium (Wallonia and Brussels)
3: Switzerland
4: The Netherlands
5: Germany
6: Canada

V4: Political party**:** which political party is the politician a member of

String variable

electorate: Political party (like V4) but with party names that correspond to those used in the citizen data.

String variable

V5: Level: at which level is the politician active?

1: Regional
2: Federal

SID: *Statement ID*

Belgium (Flanders:VL; Wallonia&francophone Brussels: WL)

be_5	The right to strike should be restricted
be_6	Belgium should never expel someone to a country where human rights are violated.
be_8	The retirement age may not exceed 67 years.

Switzerland

ch_A4	Hospitals need to have a "Babyklappe" where parents can leave their infant anonymously.
ch_A6	Switzerland should only accept well-educated immigrants.
ch_A8	Taxes on high-income should be raised while taxes on low-income should be reduced.
ch_A9	The pension age needs to be raised to 67.
ch_B4	Same-sex couples who have registered their partnership should be allowed to adopt children.

Canada

ca_1	Canada should increase the number of immigrants it admits each year.
ca_2	The government should provide a guaranteed annual income.
ca_6	The retirement age to receive Canada Pension Plan benefits should be raised to 70.
ca_8	Individuals who are terminally ill should be allowed to end their lives with the assistance of a doctor.

Germany

de_A3	Citizens with higher incomes should be taxed more heavily than today.
de_A6	The retirement age should be raised step by step.
de_A8	Foreign citizens' children that were born and raised in Germany should be allowed to keep their parent's citizenship in addition to the German citizenship.
de_B3	Income and wealth should be redistributed in favor of poorer people.
de_B8	Declined asylum seekers should be more consequently deported.

Q10: Own position: *Do you personally disagree or agree with this policy proposal? (For party leaders: Does your party disagree or agree with this policy proposal?)*

1: totally disagree
2: rather disagree
3: rather agree
4: totally agree
5: undecided (neutral or no opinion)

Q11: Perceived public position (undecided): *What percentage of [country] citizens you think is undecided about this policy proposal? Please give us your best guess by dragging the bar to the correct percentage.*

Numerical variable (percentage)

Q12: Perceived public position (agree): *And, what percentage of those citizens who have an opinion rather agrees or totally agrees with this policy proposal?*

Numerical variable (percentage)

Q11_dis: Perceived public position (undecided): *What percentage of [district electorate] citizens you think is undecided about this policy proposal? Please give us your best guess by dragging the bar to the correct percentage.*

Numerical variable (percentage)

>> CH only, a variation of Q11 to reflect the electoral system (national elections in districts/cantons).

Q12_dis: Perceived public position (agree): *And, what percentage of those citizens who have an opinion rather agrees or totally agrees with this policy proposal?*

Numerical variable (percentage)

>> See comment with Q11.

Q15: Perception of party electorate position (undecided): *Think about the current voters of your party. What percentage of them is undecided about this policy proposal?*

Numerical variable (percentage)

Q16: Perception of party electorate position (agree/disagree): *What percentage of the current voters of your party who do have an opinion about this, rather agrees or totally agrees with this policy proposal?*

Numerical variable (percentage)

V6: Region: for regional politicians, which region is the politician from?

String variable

Missing/not applicable: -99

>> CH only to indicate which canton the politician is from.

>> CA used it to separate the Ontario politicians

BE_parl_region_Brussels dummy: is politician in Brussels regional parliament?
BE_parl_region_Wallonia dummy: is politician in Walloon regional parliament?
BE_parl_community_French dummy: is politician in French community parliament?
BE_parl_region_flanders dummy: is politician in Flemish regional (= community) parliament?
BE_parl_federal dummy: is politician in federal parliament?
>> BE only.

CH_parl: Which parliament is the politician member of?

1 National Council (Lower House)

2 Council of States (Senate)

3 Grand Council Berne
4 Grand Council Geneva
>> CH only.

sex: gender of the politician
0: male 1: female

yob: year of birth of the politician
Numerical variable (year with four digits, e.g. 1954)

yofe: the year of first election in the parliament of the politician. This does not need to be the parliament they are currently seating in; another parliament (regional/federal/European) does also count. Note that lower levels of government such as provinces or municipalities do not count.
Numeric variable (year with four digits, e.g. 1996)

uniedu[3]: Does the politician have a University degree (BA, MA, Ph.D., MBA, also from Technical Universities)
0: no University education 1: University degree
>> -99 if no information is available

[3] In Belgium, this is a recode of a string variable "education" that contains the name of the diploma(s) the politician has achieved.

cou_agr_cal: country agree calculated: What is the *weighed* percentage of citizens agreeing on a policy proposal in the country of the politician (after excluding those who do not have an opinion)? (recalculated to match the estimation of the politicians; disagree + agree = 100%)

Numeric variable (percentage)

ele_agr_cal: electorate agree calculated: What is the (unweighed) percentage of citizens agreeing on a policy proposal in the electorate of the politician (after excluding those who do not have an opinion)? (recalculated to match the estimation of the politicians; disagree + agree = 100%)

Numeric variable (percentage)

dis_agr_cal: district agree calculated: What is the *weighed* percentage of citizens agreeing on a policy proposal in the district of the politician (after excluding those who do not have an opinion)? (recalculated to match the estimation of the politicians; disagree + agree = 100%)

Numeric variable (percentage)

>> CH only

SID_numerical: *Statement ID*

Numerical variable

Selected_statement: statement selected for the study

0: no 1: yes

statement_categories: policy domain of the statement (SID_numerical)

1: economy
2: pension
3: immigration
4: cultural liberal issus
0: no category

conservative_direction: statement worded in the direction of a more conservative policy decision

0: no 1: yes

V4_numerical: Political party**:** which political party is the politician a member of

Numerical variable

party_family: party families created on basis of scores from the comparative manifesto project

10=greens,
20=radical left,
30=social democrats,
40=liberals,
50=christian democrats,
60=conservatives,
70=nationalists/radical right,
90=ethnic and regionalist parties,

95=special issue parties,
999=no party family

leftright: Parties' scores on the left-right scale as taken from CSES module 4. For Belgium (not in CSES module 4), we used scores from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2019.

Numerical variable

3. Wording of survey questions

The core of the study is on how politicians perceived public opinion. For that, we presented each politician with a set of concrete policy proposals relevant to their country. For each policy statement, politicians in Belgium, Canada and Germany were asked to assess support among the *general public* and among their *own party electorate*. Politicians in Switzerland also assessed *party electorate opinion,* and additionally *district opinion* (but not general public opinion).

The list of policy statements is detailed above in this document.

Here is the exact question wording we have used for politicians in relation to the policy statements.

a. Belgium, Canada, Germany

In Belgium, Canada and Germany, the introduction was as follows:

> *On the next pages, you will be presented with some policy statements. Each is a concrete proposal to change or maintain existing policy. For each of those statements, we would like to know two things. First, we will ask about your personal opinion about the proposals. Second, we will ask you to estimate the opinion of all [citizens in Flanders/Wallonia/Canada/Germany] about these policy proposals. We do this in two steps: first, we ask you to estimate how many people are neutral or have no opinion. Second, we ask you to estimate how many people, of those who have an opinion, agree with the proposal. We are aware of the fact that this can be a difficult task, but we ask that you give us your best guess.*

The following questions were repeated, then, for each proposal (order of proposals was randomized):

> *Do you personally disagree or agree with this policy proposal?*
> Answer options: Totally disagree; Rather disagree; Rather agree; Totally agree; Undecided (neutral or no opinion)
>
> *Were we to present the same policy proposal to a representative sample of [Flemish/Walloon/Canadian/German] citizens, what would be your expectation with regard to their answers? What percentage of [country citizens] you think is undecided (neutral or no opinion) about this policy proposal? Please give us your best guess by dragging the bar to the correct percentage.*
> Answers are given by dragging a slider on a 0-100% scale.

And, what percentage of those citizens who do *have an opinion rather agrees or totally agrees with this policy proposal?*
Answers are given by dragging a slider on a 0-100% scale.

After this question block, politicians were asked to assess the importance of each proposal for them personally. After that, we moved on to their estimations of the opinion of the politician's party electorate:

On the next pages we are going to again ask you questions about the same policy proposals. But now, our questions will be about your party's electorate instead of the general public. Please give us your best guess.

We asked about the party electorate estimations totally separately, and with a salience question in between, to make sure that these estimations would not be affected by the general public opinion estimations. The question wording remained the same:

Think about the current voters of your party. What percentage of them is undecided about this policy proposal?
Answers are given by dragging a slider on a 0-100% scale.

What percentage of the voters who do have an opinion rather agrees or totally agrees with this policy proposal?
Answers are given by dragging a slider on a 0-100% scale.

b. Switzerland

The Swiss survey asked politicians to estimate the opinions of the citizens in their *electoral district* (instead of those of the general population) by asking them: "*Of all those eligible to vote in your canton: which part of the citizens is undecided (neutral or no opinion) about this policy proposal?*" followed by "*And what part of the citizens who have an opinion rather agrees or totally agrees with this policy proposal?*" . Besides that, the Swiss questions were identical to those from the other surveys.