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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Details of survey questions

The core of the study is on how politicians perceived public opinion. It is based on survey questions asked to politicians in Belgium, Canada, Germany and Switzerland.

Each politician was presented 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 and the exact wording of the questions can be found below.

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Policy proposals per country

	Flanders	Policy domain
5	The right to strike should be restricted	Economy
6	Belgium should never expel someone to a country where human rights are violated.	Immigration
8	The retirement age may not exceed 67 years.	Pension
	Wallonia (including Brussels)	
5	The right to strike should be restricted	Economy
6	Belgium should never expel someone to a country where human rights are violated.	Migration
8	The retirement age may not exceed 67 years.	Pension
	Switzerland	
A4	Hospitals need to have a "Babyklappe" where parents can leave their infant anonymously.	Cultural
A6	Switzerland should only accept well-educated immigrants.	Immigration
A8	Taxes on high-income should be raised while taxes on low-income should be reduced.	Economy
A9	The pension age needs to be raised to 67.	Pension
B4	Same-sex couples who have registered their partnership should be allowed to adopt children.	Cultural
	Germany	
A3	Citizens with higher incomes should be taxed more heavily than today.	Economy
A6	The retirement age should be raised step by step.	Pension
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.	Immigration
B3	Income and wealth should be redistributed in favor of poorer people.	Economy
B8	Declined asylum seekers should be more consequently deported.	Immigration
	Canada	
1	Canada should increase the number of immigrants it admits each year.	Immigration
2	The government should provide a guaranteed annual income.	Economy
6	The retirement age to receive Canada Pension Plan benefits should be raised to 70.	Pension
8	Individuals who are terminally ill should be allowed to end their lives with the assistance of a doctor.	Cultural

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.