

Policy Responsiveness

Lecture 2

Today

- Theory of policy responsiveness
- Techniques for studying policy responsiveness
- More nuanced results
- Ideas for research

1. Theory of policy responsiveness

What is policy responsiveness?

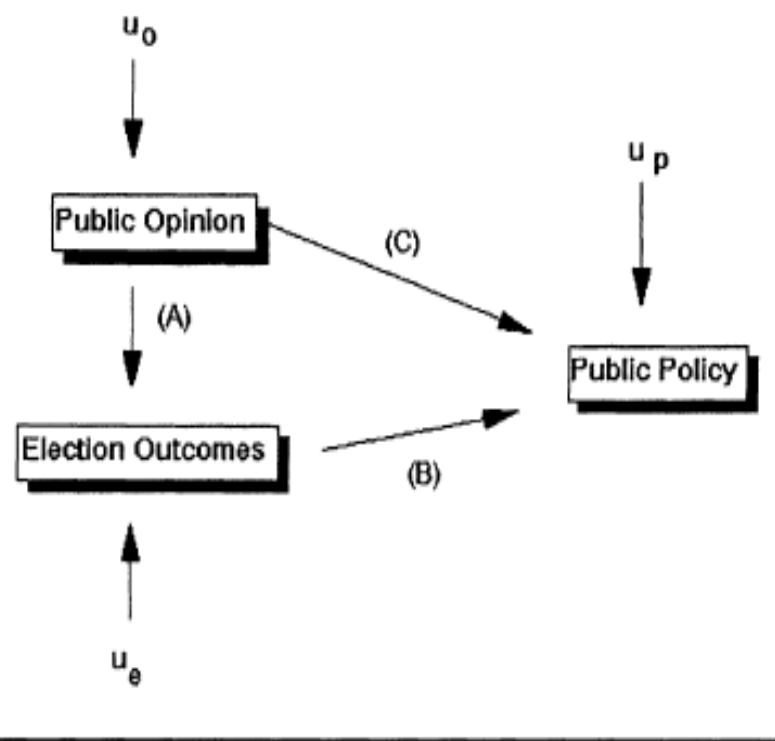
- Politicians follow will of public
 - Congruence: exact match between public preferences and policy
 - Responsiveness: policy changes with changes in preferences
- But
 - Should they converge exactly?
 - With no time delay?
 - On all issues?

Potential mechanisms

- Incentives – rational anticipation
 - Politicians afraid of consequences of not listening: lose elections, protest, revolution
 - Requires that voters (i) know what politicians do and (ii) punish them for doing different things
- Selection of types
 - Voters choose politicians that have similar beliefs and values
 - Politicians then carry out those values
 - Policy changes with elections
- Altruism
 - Politicians want to please people, want to be loved
 - Public has good ideas

FIGURE 1

The Pathways to Dynamic Representation



Case for responsiveness

- Fundamental idea of democracy: people rule
- Citizens know what is best for them
- Wisdom of crowds
- Politicians are corrupt and self-interested, need to be controlled and disciplined

Case against responsiveness

- Citizens have no real opinions about most issues, especially complicated ones – can't provide guidance
- Citizens have uninformed or bad opinions
 - Desire things which are bad for them and for society
 - May wish to oppress others
- Citizens can be manipulated by politicians or groups
- Pandering: politicians try to please voters with policies that they know will have negative effects
- Leadership is a good thing
 - Should politicians do what is right or what people want?
 - But Brecht: unhappy is the land that needs a hero

When will responsiveness yield the best policies?

- Best = policies in the real interests of citizens
 - Substantive representation
- Citizens need to actually know and prefer the policies with the best consequences for society
 - Or the aggregate average of opinions somehow = the best policies
- How often does public desire what is right?
- Where would you trust the Czech public?
- Where would you not trust it?

2. Techniques for studying responsiveness

The major problems

- Measures of what the public wants
 - Can they identify exact policies?
 - Or just more/less/about the same?
- Measures of policy/actions of politicians
- Controls for other causes of policy and opinion
- Reverse causality: policy => preferences

Dyadic representation

- Miller and Stokes (1963)
 - Public opinion on issue positions in US Congressional districts
 - Link to preferences and behavior (roll-call votes) of representatives in those districts
- Results: good correspondence
 - Social welfare: parties nominate different candidates and voters pick closer
 - Civil rights: MPs anticipate what voters prefer
 - Correspondence depends on salience of issue
- Problems
 - Need a common scale of measurement
 - Roll call votes \neq policy (position-taking)
 - Who is influencing whom?

What about proportional systems like CZ

- Can't link citizens with individual MPs
 - Multiple MPs represent each district
 - Maybe for Senate?
- Try to link parties with their voters
 - Opinions of party voters
 - Opinions of MPs or placement of party on left-right spectrum

Party representation

- Luna and Zechmeister (2005)
- Survey of voters on important policy issues
 - Disaggregate by party identification or vote intention
 - Is it true that parties only represent their own voters?
- Survey of MPs – average ideology of party
- Results
 - Wide variations in Latin America
 - More developed countries and more institutionalized party systems better
 - Drastic neoliberal reforms make representation worse
- Problems
 - Are we measuring policy?
 - Are we showing causality?

How to measure policy?

- Survey of legislators – opinions on policies
 - Sincerity? Is it policy?
- Roll-call votes in parliament
 - Party discipline, strategic voting
- Interest group evaluations of MPs
- Expert survey of positions of parties
- Lists of major legislation (label as left or right)

Collective representation

- Monroe (1979, 1998), Gilens (2005), also studies on France & Germany
- Gather all national-level surveys asking about concrete policy changes
- Is the change made or not?
- Results
 - 50-70% of time government does what citizens want
- Problems
 - Depends on issues that surveys cover
 - Is it causality or just correspondence?

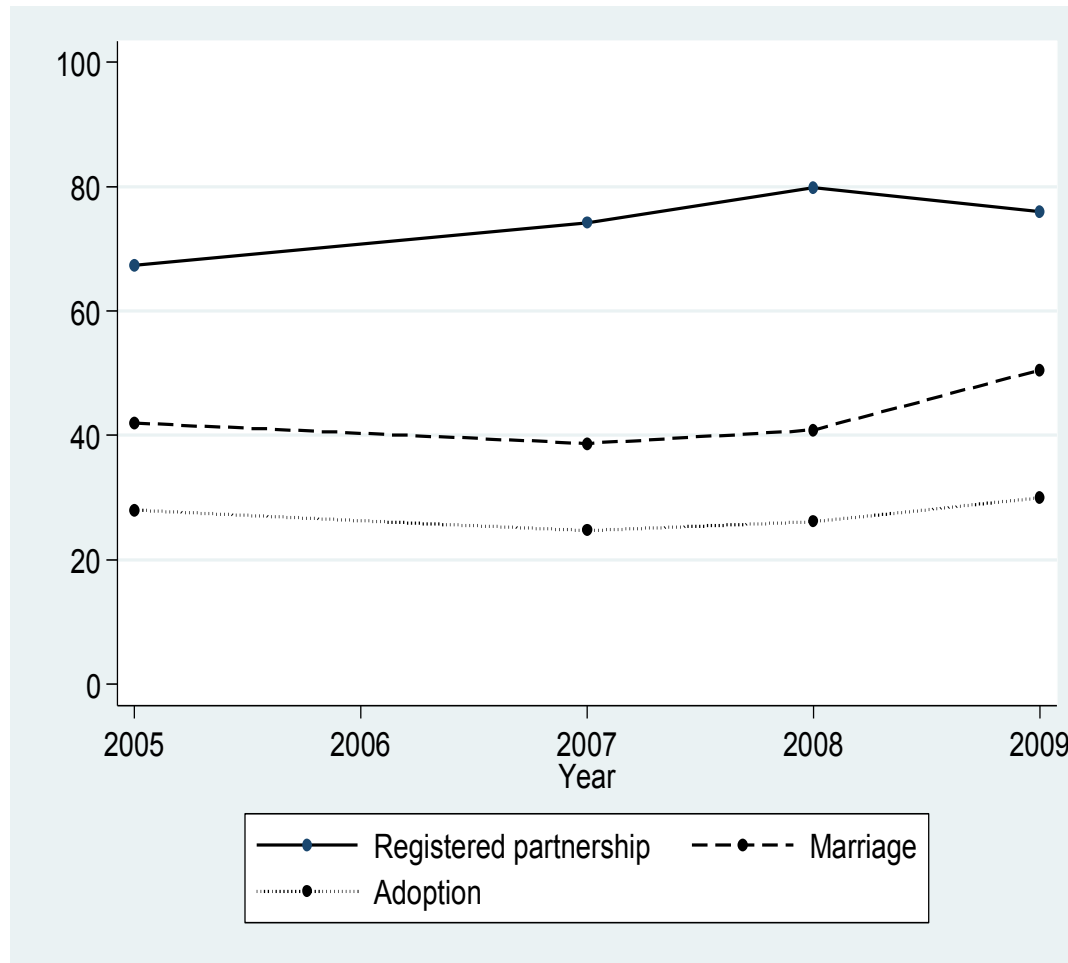
How do we isolate causality?

- Control for other factors
 - Media, interest groups, parties, civil society
 - Very few studies do this
- Time-series
 - Responsiveness is a temporal idea: changes in public opinion lead to change in policy
 - Do changes in public opinion precede changes in policy?

One clever way

- Page and Shapiro (1983)
- Look at all significant changes in public opinion
- What percentage of changes are followed by a change in policy?
- Result
 - In US, 2/3 of changes in public opinion => change in policy in same direction

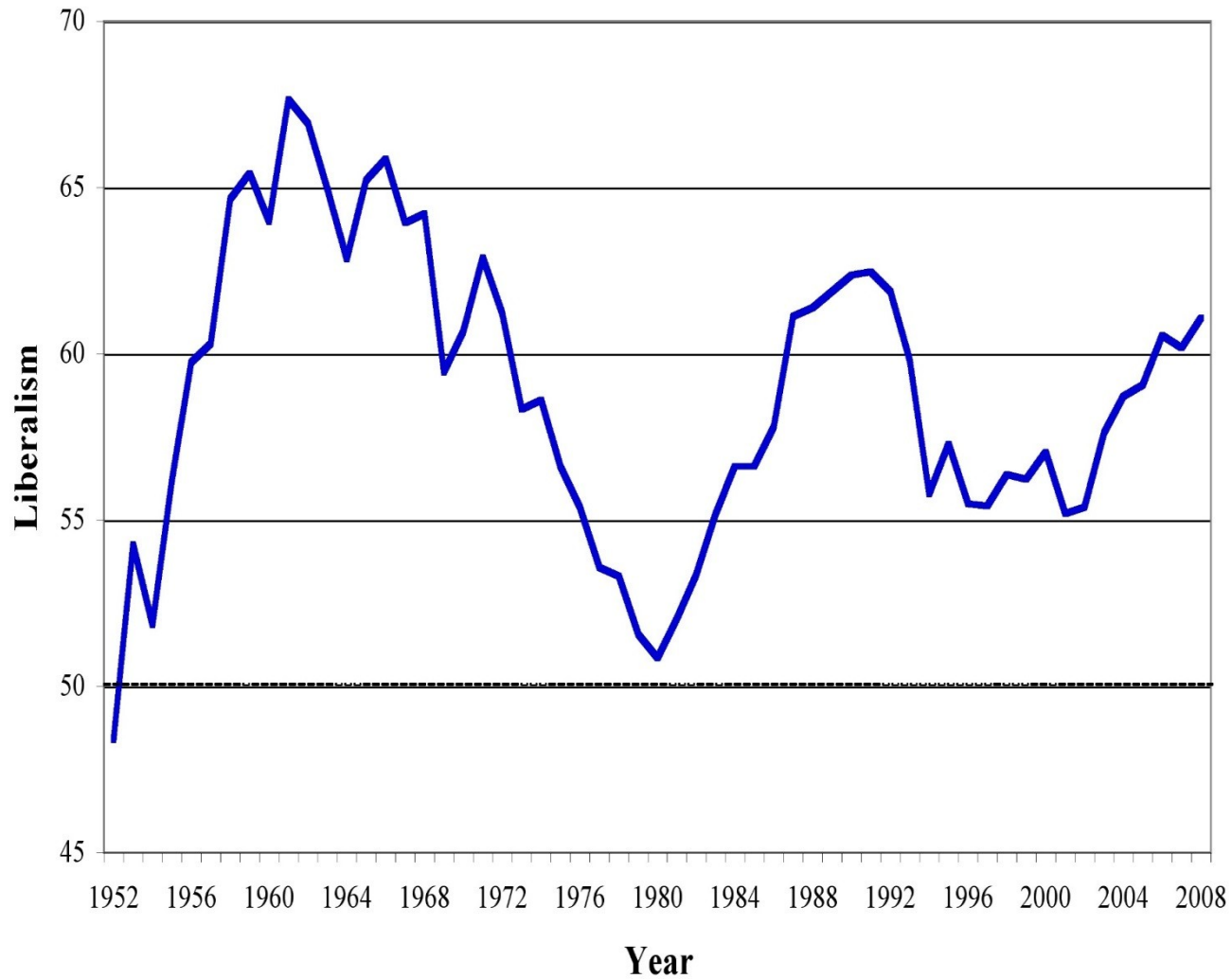
Rights of same-sex couples in CZ



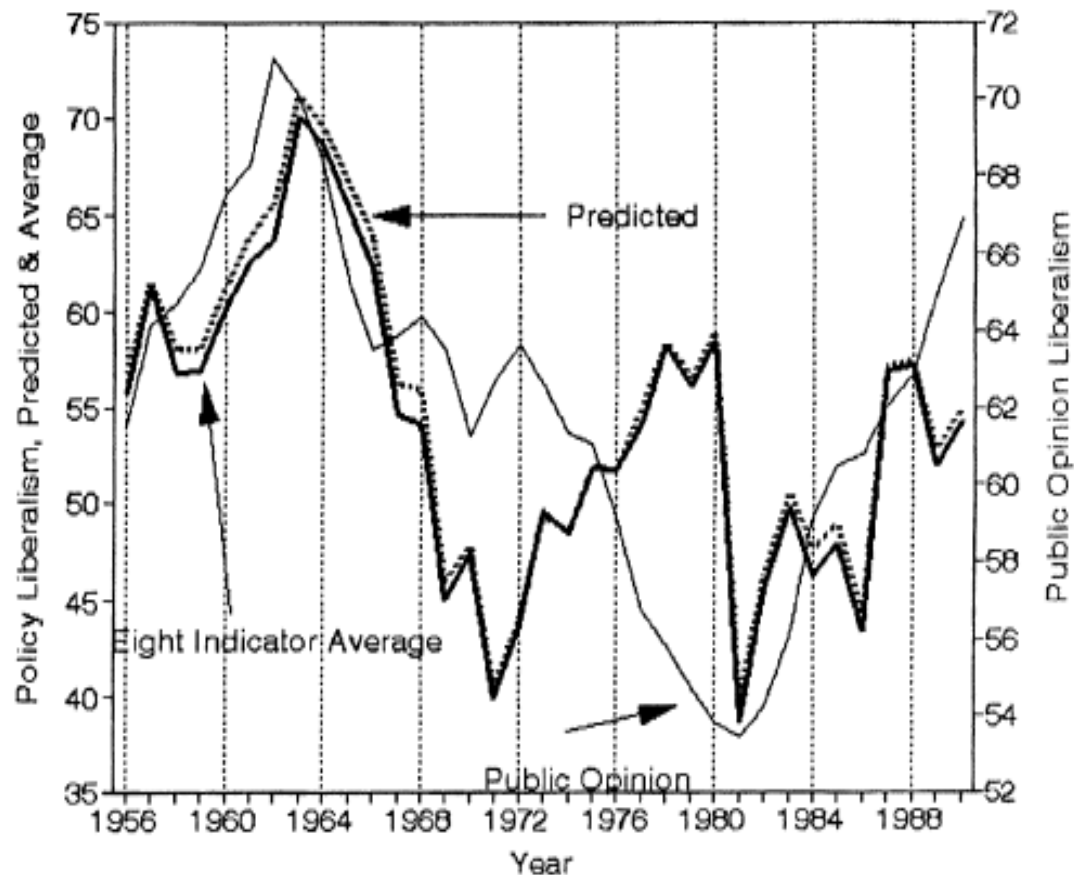
Can we be more systematic?

- Dynamic representation
 - Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (1995)
- Policy mood: do citizens want large, more active government or smaller, less active government
 - Advantage: long time-series, other policy issues come and go
 - Disadvantage: very abstract
- Measures of policy
 - Interest group ratings of MPs
 - Roll-call votes
 - Lists of major legislation (they use this more in later work)

Policy mood in US



Putting policy and public opinion together



Results

- Strong responsiveness for all four branches
 - 1 point change in mood => 1 point change in policy
- Change is fast
 - For legislature, most of public opinion change reflected in policy within 1 year
 - For Supreme Court: 2 years
- Differences across branches
 - House of Representatives: direct effect of public opinion strongest
 - Senate: indirect effect through elections stronger – change in Senators leads to change in policy
 - President: change in party of president has largest effects

Why is the Supreme Court responsive to public opinion?

- Judges have political motivations
- Court depends on other actors for enforcement
 - No control over police, bureaucracy
 - If they take unpopular actions, then other actors (executive, legislative) won't enforce
- Court needs to maintain legitimacy
 - Countermajoritarian dilemma
 - How can unelected judges make policy

3. Some more nuanced results

Lumpers and splitters

- What are politicians responsive to:
 - General public mood (lumpers)
 - Opinion on specific issues (splitters)
- Does politician say: “The public’s mood is becoming more hostile to government, let’s think of ways to cut government”
- Or: “The public dislikes Church restitution, let’s limit or stop Church restitution”

Druckman and Jacobs (2006)

- Private polls conducted by Richard Nixon
- When Nixon has specific policy data, he uses it
 - Tries to win over general public
- When an issue is not so important, he doesn't collect data about specific policy and focuses on general ideology trends
 - Appeals to his core supporters

When are politicians most responsive?

- When elections are near
 - Public has short time horizon – only remembers most recent policy when voting
 - Honeymoon effect – politicians get free rein at start of term, mandate to rule
- When popularity is moderate
 - High popularity (eg, 70% approval) – I can do what I want and ignore the public
 - Low popularity (eg, 30% approval) – Small policy changes won't help me, so just do what I want

Public as thermostat

- Public can influence policy, but policy can also influence public
 - Public may adjust preferences depending on what policymakers do
- If policy becomes too liberal, public becomes more conservative
 - Thermostat adjusts heat to keep temperature constant
- Spending preferences of public (“Should we increase or decrease spending on defense?”) and actual spending
 - Finds that policy has negative affect on public opinion
 - More spending => preferences for less spending

Gaps in our knowledge

- To what extent do politicians manipulate public opinion?
 - How do they do it? Can you see it in CZ?
- Can we control for other causes of policy?
 - Media, interest groups, civil society
- What about inequalities in responsiveness?
 - Do politicians listen to some groups more than others?
 - Most studies focus on average person

Collective representation in CZ

- All questions on policy issues asked in national surveys of public opinion in the Czech Republic from 1990 to 2009
 - Do you support or oppose tuition fees for university?
- To date 586 questions from CVVM
- Determine whether policy adopted within 4 years

Preliminary results

- 59% of policies supported by majority adopted
- 32% opposed by majority adopted
- Altogether 62% of policies fit majority preferences
- Comparable to studies of US, France, & Germany

What are policy areas where CZ politicians don't listen to public?

- Public opposed but adopted
 - Social policy cuts (copays, retirement age)
 - Church restitution (but opposite in past)
 - Missile defense?
- Public supports but not adopted
 - Restrict MP immunity
 - Referenda
 - Death penalty
 - Direct presidential election (in past)