

RepResent

Representation and Democratic Resentment

Period : 2018-2022

Abstract

Existing democracies are challenged by critics such as Trump, Brexiteers and populists claiming that democracy is not representative anymore. RepResent takes these claims serious by empirically examining the relationship between popular democratic resentment and the functioning of representation. Is representation failing? And, is democratic resentment driven by failing representation? Democratic representation consists of several dimensions, a substantive (policies), a procedural (institutions) and a symbolic dimension (feeling represented by representatives). Adequate representation entails there is congruence between the preferences of citizens and the actual policies, democratic procedures and representatives. RepResent is novel in the sense that it systematically compares citizens' views with elites' views, that it tackles all three dimensions at the same time to assess their individual contribution to democratic resentment, and that it does so in a dynamic over-time design. Concretely, RepResent examines the 2019 elections in Belgium, the campaign that precedes it and the term that follows. Its institutional structure makes Belgium a good, even a critical case. Using a large variety of methods all with a dynamic component and ranging from traditional panel surveys, over content analyses and experiments, to focus groups and interviews, RepResent aims to dig deep into one of the root causes of the widespread democratic resentment characterizing current politics.

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