

Section 11 - Metodologia della ricerca (Research Methodology)

Chairs: Luigi Curini, Vincenzo Memoli

Elenco e descrizione di tutti i panels

Panel 11.4 Measuring political congruence: methodological challenges

Chairs: Andrea Pedrazzani, Nicolò Conti

Congruence is a central problem to political life and one that is strictly linked to the overall performance of the political system and to the accountability and reputation of decision makers. To understand its relevance it would be enough to mention that the party mandate theory of democracy requires that citizens vote for the parties which are closest to their positions and that the electoral outcome is a means to translate voters' preferences into public policy. Similarly, in a principal-agent framework, preference congruence across the several steps of the democratic life cycle is presumed to reduce the risk of delegation problems. It is evident that several theoretical approaches assume – sometimes even in normative terms – a certain level of congruence among voters' preferences, party platforms and policy output and it is a matter of empirical corroboration to establish whether this can be proved or not.

Congruence is a concept that could be applied to many different contexts. Examples may include (but are not confined to) ideological proximity between citizens and elites, congruence across different stages of formation of policy agenda (i.e. from voters' opinions to MPs' preferences, government's legislation and bureaucratic actions), or correspondence between the political agenda and the media agenda in the allocation of attention among issues. Congruence can also refer to intra-party congruence as a basis for party effectiveness in parliament, or to preference similarity between the houses of a bicameral parliament. Almost in every case, assessment of congruence represents a crucial methodological challenge. The main reason of it stems from the fact that measuring congruence normally implies integration and analysis of non-homogeneous data possibly related to different actors, or to different aspects of the political system. Assessing congruence is particularly problematic when the data used come from data generating processes of different nature. In this panel, we have a special interest in papers that 1) provide clear definitions of congruence and its operationalisation and 2) give examples of how it can be measured from an empirical point of view. Aside from these two conditions, we accept papers treating congruence either as a dependent or as an independent variable. We are open to any approach and to any method, as well as to any (including original) definition of congruence in politics.