

The Responsive Union: National Elections and European Governance

Christina J. Schneider. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. £75.00. 345 pp.

The European Union may be more democratic – or at least more responsive to democratic pressures – than some might think. The proof of this lies in the intergovernmental bargaining that takes place in the Council of Ministers (or, more accurately, the Council of the European Union). The national politicians who come together to make decisions are all elected – or at least, their coalitions are. Hence, they have an incentive to demonstrate that they are pursuing the interests of the voters they represent. In an ideal world, they would secure policies that work to the advantage of their electorates. At a minimum, they have an incentive to delay any policy decisions likely to go against their voters' interests until some quiet moment between elections. The signalling, bargaining and delaying tactics they employ together constitute a kind of 'democratic responsiveness'. This is perhaps not as elegant as having an all-powerful European Parliament, but it is still more democratic than the usual tropes about Brussels bureaucrats are prepared to acknowledge, and is probably as much democracy as the system can support given the central role of national politics in determining EU policy.

Christina Schneider uses an array of analytic strategies to demonstrate how this democratic responsiveness works within a European context. She deploys experimental techniques to show that voters are paying attention, and uses a series of statistical models and datasets to show the implications of her argument as they play out in multi-annual budget negotiations and in the more general legislative process. She also sets out case studies based in part on interviews with many of the participants to show how the budget negotiations evolved in the early 2000s under the shadow of Europe's historic enlargement, and how the Germans failed to slow down the bailout required at the start of the Greek sovereign-debt crisis. The conclusion she offers is that politicians can try to be responsive, but that does not mean that either they or their voters always get what they want. Democracy at the European level is as imperfect as everywhere else.

Schneider's argument is impressive in terms of both the simplicity of her message and the sophistication of her data collection and analysis. Her book is sure to become a touchstone in debates about Europe's 'democratic deficit'. Even so, her argument raises questions. To begin with, Schneider focuses her large-scale statistical analysis on national elections, but her case study on the Greek bailout hinges on the regional elections in North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany. That case study also included two very different German govern-

ments – a grand coalition that existed until national elections in September 2009 and a centre-right coalition that came after. These governments had opposite perspectives on Greek finances, but it was the Social Democratic finance minister in Germany who, facing the prospect of national elections, chose in February 2009 to signal his support for a backstop. Why did he do so, contrary to the expectations of Schneider's model? And how do we know *ex ante* which contests matter?

Another set of questions concerns the role of elections to the European Parliament. These are elections that involve all member states and in which we would expect European policy issues to be most salient. They are also elections that create a natural break in the legislative process, not just because they interrupt the parliament's operations but because they correspond to the appointment of a new European Commission. If Schneider's model is correct, these events should show particularly high levels of democratic responsiveness. The late Peter Mair (cited by Schneider) worried that they did not. It would be useful to know if he was right. Democracy in the Council of the European Union is important, but a responsive European Parliament is even more so.

Close to Home: Local Ties and Voting Radical Right in Europe

Jennifer Fitzgerald. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. £75.00. 247 pp.

Debates about the future of European democracy tend to focus on the national level, but the local level may be more important. Support for radical groups varies significantly from one locality to the next. Such variation is hard to explain exclusively on the basis of macroeconomic or macro-political variables. The composition of support within localities varies as well, often in ways that cannot be explained using the stories we tell about whole parties. The 'losers-from-globalisation' thesis does not offer a compelling explanation for the attachment of left-leaning women to new radical-right parties, for example.

Jennifer Fitzgerald offers her own explanation for this localised variation in support. She argues that emotional attachment to one's local community is an important component in support for the new radical right. Indeed, such attachment is a strong predictor of support among left-leaning women for groups such as the National Rally in France or the Swiss People's Party. Moreover, we can see the influence of that emotional attachment on national electoral results whenever local issues come to the fore. In practice, this means that countries which run their national and local electoral contests closely together are likely to see more support for parties on the radical right in national elections, support that cannot be explained using the standard losers-from-globalisation story.