

Two Worlds of Dissatisfaction? Electoral Punishment and Protest Politics Compared

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Abstract

This paper compares the political consequences of the Great Recession in the electoral arena and the protest arena. By doing so, it attempts to further develop our understanding of the way citizens make their voices heard in different political arenas and how electoral and protest politics are related to each other. For this purpose, we propose to combine the literature on economic voting with the literature on economic grievances and social movements. We expect that during the Great Recession, citizens should hold the incumbent to account for the decline in economic performance (and the related crisis management), but also use the protest arena to raise their economic grievances. Thus, we expect a close connection in how the Great Recession left its marks on both arenas. However, given that the magnitude of the economic crisis differed a lot across countries and over time, we expect that the connections between the two arenas are closer in the countries that were hardest hit by the crisis and where more than one election took place in times of economic hardship. To investigate this relationship, we combine a novel dataset on protest events in 30 European countries with an updated dataset on electoral outcomes that was used by Hernández and Kriesi (2016) in their study on the electoral consequences of the Great Recession. The dataset on protests was collected by means of semi-automated content analysis allowing us to study the interaction and boundaries between electoral and protest politics in two steps. First, we ask whether the same kind of economic and political factors explain both the level of incumbent punishment in the national electoral arena and the level of (economic) protests in a given country. Second, we use the level of (economic) protests as an additional explanatory factor to explain economic voting in the national electoral arena. This allows us to compare the dynamics of opposition in the protest and electoral arena and analyse different patterns of punishment of elites in the shadow of the Great Recession.

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