

## Call for papers

UNEQUALMAND final project workshop<sup>1</sup>

Sciences Po, Paris, 24-25 September 2026

### Unequal Representation from Campaigns to Policy?

#### How electoral promises and policies contribute to the representation of social groups

Organized by:

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#### Practical information

The workshop will host approximately **15 participants**, allowing for in-depth discussion of the selected papers. We welcome proposals from scholars at all career stages. Comparative perspectives are especially encouraged, but we also welcome single-country studies and conceptually oriented contributions that speak to the broader question of how electoral promises and public policy contribute to the representation of social groups.

Accommodation and catering will be provided, and travel expenses (second class) will be reimbursed up to 500€.

If you would like to participate, please send your proposal to Isabelle Guinaudeau ([isabelle.guinaudeau@sciencespo.fr](mailto:isabelle.guinaudeau@sciencespo.fr)) by 31 May 2026. Include the title, a short abstract (about 250 words) and a list of co-authors. Notifications of acceptance will be sent shortly thereafter.

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How does political competition contribute to the representation of social groups? Normative theories of mandate representation have long assumed that elections allow citizens to shape public policy by choosing between competing programmes and by holding officeholders accountable for their commitments (Manin 1997; Pitkin 1967; Stokes 2001). Yet a large body of research suggests that representation is unequal, as public policy often reflects the interests and preferences of some groups more than others (Bartels 2008; Burgoon et al. 2022; Elsässer, Hense, and Schäfer 2021; Gilens 2012). A central challenge is therefore to understand how representation is shaped across the full trajectory from campaign commitments to policy outcomes.

This challenge is especially intriguing because electoral campaigns and policymaking do not unfold under the same political conditions. Campaigns are highly visible and competitive moments in which parties and candidates define target populations, promise to distribute benefits and burdens, and seek support by appealing to particular social groups. In such a setting, political actors may have incentives to broaden the focus of representation beyond the most powerful constituencies alone, by making commitments that can be publicly justified in terms of fairness, need, contribution, or deservingness (Deiss-Helbig et al. 2024). By contrast, classic work on the scope of conflict and more recent accounts of quiet politics suggest that policymaking often takes place in less visible arenas, where organized interests and resourceful actors are better positioned to shape outcomes (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Culpepper 2011; Schattschneider 1960).

This raises a broader set of questions. Do pre-electoral promises and commitments open a distinct representational space in which disadvantaged or weakly organized groups are more likely to be addressed? Do such promises matter for public policy at all, or does a quieter sphere of politics operate alongside and beyond them? When promises do matter, are they translated into policy evenly, or are they selectively fulfilled in ways that reintroduce inequalities in influence after the election? Building on Schneider and Ingram's (1993) distinction between the power of target populations and their social construction, this workshop invites contributions that examine how these different political logics interact across the chain linking campaign promises, policy delivery, and citizens' perceptions and responses.

We particularly welcome papers addressing one of the following three broader topics:

### **1. Pledge-making, campaigns, and the representation of social groups**

First, contributions may focus on the pre-electoral arena and on how parties and candidates construct, target, and justify political commitments toward social groups on different platforms, e.g. manifestos, media, social media, etc. Which groups receive promises, and which are ignored or only weakly or symbolically addressed? How are benefits and burdens distributed across target populations in party programmes and campaigns? To what extent are campaign commitments shaped by perceptions of deservingness, fairness, or legitimacy? And how far do power resources already matter at this stage, despite the public and competitive nature of electoral campaigns?

### **2. Policy delivery, pledge-keeping and unequal representation in office**

Second, the workshop will examine how electoral competition leaves an imprint on public policy and representation once parties and candidates enter office. Which campaign commitments survive the transition from manifesto to government action, and which are

delayed, diluted, or abandoned? Under what conditions do governments deliver on promises to marginalized groups as consistently as on promises to more powerful groups? And what kind of actions do opposition parties take to represent (marginalized) social groups? More broadly, how do institutional constraints, prioritization, and the unequal resources of target populations shape the translation of electoral commitments into policy outcomes? We welcome contributions on pledge fulfilment, but also on the broader question of whether and how electoral politics mitigates, reproduces, or transforms patterns of unequal responsiveness in office.

### 3. Voters' perceptions and responses to promises and policies

Thirdly, contributions will address how citizens perceive and respond to the representation of social groups in electoral promises and public policy. We invite papers on how voters evaluate group-targeted commitments and policies, how they respond to fulfilled and broken promises or other policy deliveries, and how information about the distributive consequences of party programmes or enacted policies affects political attitudes and behaviour. Of particular interest are the roles of deservingness perceptions, group identification, and sociotropic and egocentric considerations. Contributions may focus on vote choice, party evaluations, feelings of being represented, political trust, and retrospective assessments of government action.

### References

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