

2D or 3D?

The current shift from two to a three-dimensional issue space in Western Europe

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Abstract

The formation of issue dimensions and the relation between issue opinions and stances has remained relatively under-researched and needs further development in order to gain better understanding of voting behaviour. In this study we argue that political issue spaces are constructed in voters' minds through their personal preferences and issue salience. We argue that what makes issues salient, and these stances materialize, are the parties' policy proposals and stances, as well as the communication of these issues in the media. In other words, the issue dimensions are constructed on the basis of relating issues position to one another (preferences), as well as the attention and information given about them (salience). We examine these mechanisms through the emergence of new radical-left parties and the rising attention given to the immigration issue in Western Europe.