

Positive and negative group appeals: the un(der)explored supply side of election campaigns

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In the last decades the relationships between social groups and political parties have seen quite dramatic changes. The size of traditionally important constituencies such as workers or religious people have been shrinking due to deindustrialization and secularization, the voting behaviour of members of social groups has become less coherent due to individualization and the rise of a cultural conflict around issues such as immigration gave rise to new affinities between certain social groups and parties that differed from the affinities based on the economic conflict. Those developments beg the question, how parties appeal to social groups in this new context. Of particular interest is the question, to what extent social democratic parties still support workers, their traditional constituency that votes increasingly for the radical right. Another important question concerns groups that have become more important in the last decades such as women or immigrants: why do political parties support, criticise or avoid those social groups? Traditionally group targeting has been analysed based on issue appeals, the issues political parties emphasize, and the positions they take. However, this thesis studies an un(der)explored way of group targeting and of parties' supply side by focusing on group appeals, i.e. the group categories political parties support or criticise in their election campaign.

The research questions are answered based on the analysis of the two most recent elections in three multi-party democracies: Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. The main method of data collections consists in a textual content analysis of three types of election campaign sources sponsored by political parties: election manifestos, press releases and advertisements (TV or newspaper depending on the country). The analysis of election campaign material is supplemented by interviews with campaign managers.

