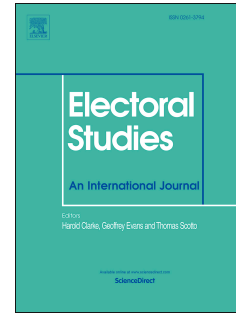


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Explaining citizen perceptions of party ideological positions: The mediating role of political contexts

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Explaining Citizen Perceptions of Party Ideological Positions: The Mediating Role of Political Contexts

Abstract

In this paper we examine how political contexts mediate citizens' ability to understand political parties' ideological positions, focusing on education level. Using cross-national data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), we explore how the effect of individual education level in influencing the supply and clarity of 'left-right' information in a party system is mediated by contextual factors. The results show that the effect of education levels in improving citizens' ability to perceive party ideological locations is conditional on political context. First, in cases where the supply of such information is limited due to less democratic experience and less programmatic party politics, the effect of education is weakened. However, the effect of education increases in contexts where we would expect less clarity of party position information—where parties are least polarized and where institutional factors add complexity to party competition.

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