

Laudation for Paul Meiners, winner of the 2021 Rudolf Wildenmann Prize

Our knowledge of International Organizations has steadily progressed over the last years: their role in global governance, their internal functioning and their relationship with member states and civil society organisations have been studied by a growing community of scholars. However, our understanding of their relation to citizens, or public opinion more generally has received slightly less attention. It is here where the 2021 Wildenmann Prize Winner, Paul Meiners, sheds new light.

In his paper - Information and Motivation – How Do Attitudes towards International Organizations Develop? - Paul Meiners, who is a PhD candidate at the University of Münster, seeks to identify the factors that shape citizens' attitudes towards International Organizations. He argues that while existing work focused on organizational- and elite characteristics to explain these attitudes, social psychological variables linked to the capability of citizens to evaluate International Organizations' legitimacy bear more salience in explaining these attitudes. His paper develops an experimental research design. Drawing on psychological work on heuristics, he aims at studying the influence of information about international authority, party cues and trust in politics on individuals' attitudes about International Organizations. Using a sample of the German population, Paul Meiners shows that the effortful reflexive reasoning determines citizens' attitudes more than partisanship.

The jury was impressed by the methodological rigor in this paper as well as the systematic presentation of the results. Methodologically, Paul Meiners employs cutting-edge

experimental techniques based on a preregistered factorial survey experiment using a large sample of the German population. This particular experimental design allows him to compare the effect sizes of the various determinants of individuals' attitudes about International Organizations. He finds that citizens respond to information about the authority of International Organizations even in the presence of strong party cues. These effects are amplified when respondents are motivated to engage in reflective reasoning. It is this synthetic design, rigorous and novel theorizing and cutting-edge methodological setup that convinced the jury that the paper makes an excellent contribution to the literature on the relationship between public opinion and international organizations.

The results of the study have further repercussions. Paul Meiners shows that in the German sample respondents see an increase of authority of international organizations as an unfavourable development. This effect is stronger by people who rely more on reflective reasoning. This finding seems to nicely align with an overall development in political systems where partisanship appears to exert less and less influence on citizens' political opinions. If partisanship continues to decline, this, will of course trigger the question of what will determine the coherence of a political system in the future, one of the central questions for political scientists.

SABINE SAURUGGER (Chair)

On behalf of the Jury

European Consortium for Political Research

