

## **The effect of legislative misalignment on the representation of constituency interests (Vardges Levonyan and Oda Nedregård)**

How do elected officials respond when they learn that they are misaligned with their constituencies? While existing research has documented that politicians either update their positions or discount disagreeable public opinion, we propose and investigate a third mechanism: strategic issue avoidance. Using the 2016 Brexit referendum as an exogenous information treatment, we study how Members of Parliament (MPs) responded to sudden, measurable incongruence with their constituencies. Using a difference-in-differences framework comparing Remain-supporting MPs in Leave-voting constituencies to similarly positioned MPs in Remain-voting constituencies, we find that misaligned MPs substantially participate less in EU-related topics following the referendum. This drop in participation is not compensated by increased discussion in other topics. When they do speak about the EU, they avoid stance-taking and their language becomes less extreme. These effects are specific to the EU topic, robust to a wide range of specifications, and not driven by regional or party dynamics. The findings provide the first large-scale causal evidence of strategic issue avoidance in legislative speech and highlight important implications for studying political preferences through text. Specifically, silence may reflect strategic withdrawal rather than moderation or diminished salience, potentially introducing bias into speech-based measures of representation. Additionally, strategic issue avoidance may suppress meaningful debate on high-salience issues, thereby shaping democratic accountability and policy outcomes.