Economic Inequality and Legislative Agendas in Europe

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DESSERT, AMERICAN STYLE...

AND HOW ABOUT SOME WHIPPED CREAM WITH THAT?!
What are the effects of income inequality on the policy attention of European legislators?
Problem responsiveness hypothesis

As income inequality grows, there will be a corresponding **increase** in legislative attention to social-safety net issues.
Negative Agenda Power hypothesis

As income inequality grows, there will be a corresponding **decrease** in legislative attention to social-safety net issues and the overall agenda will become **less** topically diverse.
Data

Policy topic coding of bills and laws (legislative agenda) according to **21 topics** of the Comparative Agendas Project in **9 countries**: Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the UK.
Two dependent variables

Entropy measure

- If, in a given year, every law was on the same topic, then the system would have a very low entropy score for that year.
- Shannon’s diversity index ranging from 0 (low entropy) to 1 (high entropy).
- Is entropy increasing or decreasing as inequality grows?

Compositional DV

- It expresses change in attention to topic x as a relative to topic y.
- 4 topics: economy, social order, social safety net, other.
- Is attention to social-safety issues increasing or decreasing relative to other groups as inequality grows?
Two dependente variables

Entropy measure
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Compositional DV
• It expresses change in attention to topic $x$ relative to topic $y$
• 4 topics: economy, social order, social safety, other
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Public Laws
Simulated attention to Public Laws
Simulated attention to Legislative Bills
What is the impact of income inequality on policy attention?

As income inequality increases, legislative agendas are:

– less diverse
– less focused on social safety issues (with respect to other macro issues)