

Between Bargaining and Deliberation: Decision-Making in the Council of the European Union

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Abstract: The Council of the European Union (EU) is a crucial actor in EU legislative decision-making. However, how it reaches decisions is subject to considerable debate. Constructivists argue that the dominant mode is norm-guided behaviour and deliberation, pointing to the informal 'culture of consensus'. Scholars working in a rational choice tradition assume that member states strive to maximize their utility and move outcomes as close as possible to their ideal positions, either by using their power in bargaining or by arranging beneficial exchanges of votes. Several bargaining and exchange models have been advanced by this literature. This contribution explores the logics underlying these different conceptualizations of negotiations in the Council of the EU. Furthermore, it discusses the interpretation of the existing empirical results and tasks for future research. Due to observational equivalence empirical findings are often inconclusive.

Keywords: Constructivism; Council of the European Union; culture of consensus; modes of decision-making; observational equivalence; rational choice