

Carl Heese

Presentation Title

Voter Attention and Distributive Politics

Abstract

Demographic groups in the population pay systematically different attention to politics and acquire different levels of information. This paper studies the effects of heterogeneous attention when a reform may benefit one group at the expense of others (distributive politics). In the benchmark, when the information of voters is exogenous, a median voter theorem holds, and a welfare-enhancing reform is not adopted if it is not preferred by a majority. When information is endogenous, attention shifts election outcomes into a direction that is welfare-improving. Even when a welfare-enhancing reform is not preferred by a majority ex-post, under certain conditions, there are equilibria where the reform is adopted. The key driver of the results is that voters who are more severely affected by a proposed reform will pay more attention, consistent with empirical studies ("issue publics hypothesis," Converse (1964)). This information advantage translates into voting power, precluding the majority from exerting its dominance.

Keywords

Information Aggregation, Elections, Attention, Distributive Politics

Affiliation

University of Bonn