

« Ethical voters and the demand for political news »

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Question: media and voting

- How does the degree of competition in the media market affect
 - Turnout
 - Media slant
 - Selection of competent politicians?

Overall

- Interesting and important issue
- Well motivated
- Some novelty in modelling
- To improve clarity of assumptions and robustness of the results

Empirical evidence of media competition on turnout

- Positive effect (Gentzkow, Shapiro and Sinkinson, AER, 2011)
- Negative effect (Enikolopov, Petrova and Zhuravskaya, AER, 2011)

Key assumption

- Each voter maximizes the utility of his or her group, disciplined by « ethics ».
- Group is the unit of the analysis
- There are three groups: two partisans (A, B) and one independent

Model

- Two symmetric candidates: A, B
- Two states of nature: if the state is A (resp. B), A is competent and B is not competent
- Independents: they prefer the competent candidate
- Partisans: they prefer their own candidate:
 - if the rival candidate wins, it is the worst case.
 - If their own candidate wins, each member partisan's payoff is higher when the elected candidate is competent

How does information affect turnout?: independents

- Independents always vote for the competent candidate if they are informed: otherwise, they do not vote since they are indifferent between the two candidates

How does information affect turnout?: partisans

- The marginal gain from one more vote
= the marginal increase in the probability of
winning * the payoff from winning

Note that the marginal increase in the
probability of winning is constant in the model

How does information affect turnout?: partisans

- The marginal gain from electing the preferred candidate decreases as we move from
 - (a) when the preferred candidate is competent
 - (b) when there is no information about his competency
 - (c) when he is incompetent
- The turnout decreases as we move from (a) to (b), from (b) to (c)
- The cost of voting is convex
- **More information reduces the expected turnout**

Overall

- More information increases the turnout of independents and decreases the expected turnout of partisans
- Whether more information increases or decreases the total turnout depends on the fraction of independents in the population

Comments

- The result that the value of information of one group *does not depend* on whether the other groups are informed or not is **too surprising**
- The way randomness is introduced into the voting outcome is wierd: the majority rule and no uncertainty about how many members of each group will vote for which candidate leaves no room for randomness

Comments

- Furthermore, the uniform noise does not make much sense; the noise should be concentrated around ties. Robustness of the results?
- I guess that each agent is assumed to consume only one media. If yes, it should be written more clearly.

Robustness to some status-quo and non-drastic information?

- Suppose that initially, A is a bit more likely to be competent.
- Information: if good, A is even more likely; if bad, A is equally likely
- Independents: the information reduces their expected turnout
- Partisans: the information increases their expected turnout