

Understanding Voting Behaviour in Direct Democracy

MIN SHU

WASEDA UNIVERSITY

Outline of the lecture

- ▶ Utilitarian Explanations
- ▶ Cognition and Heuristics
- ▶ Institutional Context
- ▶ Campaign Discourses
- ▶ The Status Quo Bias
- ▶ Discussions

Utilitarian explanations

- ▶ Models of economic voting
 - ▶ Retrospective economic voting
 - ▶ Prospective economic voting
- ▶ Cost-benefit calculations
 - ▶ Individual-level calculations
 - ▶ Group-based/regional/national level calculations
- ▶ Ballot issue or contextual factor(s)?
 - ▶ The economic context of a popular vote
 - ▶ Expected winners or losers of a ballot proposal

Cognition and Heuristics

- ▶ Are voters competent in making their choices in direct democracy?
- ▶ General cognitive capability
 - ▶ Educational level
 - ▶ Interest in political affairs
 - ▶ Media usage and consumption
- ▶ Specific ballot-related knowledge
 - ▶ Awareness of the ballot proposal
 - ▶ Understandings of the (potential) consequences of ballot options
 - ▶ The campaign messages

Cognition and Heuristics

- ▶ Heuristics
 - ▶ Information shortcut
 - ▶ Campaign cues
- ▶ Trust and campaign cues
 - ▶ People tend to believe the messages of the campaigners whom they trust
- ▶ Interest representation and information shortcuts
 - ▶ Ideological representation (e.g., trade unions, political parties)
 - ▶ Religious representation (e.g., the church)
 - ▶ Sectoral representation (e.g., agricultural cooperatives)

Institutional context

- ▶ Models of strategic voting
 - ▶ Don't waste your vote!
 - ▶ Sincere voting vs. strategic voting
- ▶ Institutional context of direct voting
 - ▶ Compulsory or optional ballots
 - An optional ballot shows that the initiator is (generally) confident in the ballot proposal.
 - ▶ Binding or non-binding ballots
 - A non-binding ballot can be used to express voters' dissatisfaction with the ballot advocator(s)

Campaign discourses

- ▶ The structure of voting campaigns
 - ▶ Mobilization structure (campaign coalition)
 - ▶ The structure of campaign arguments (issue salience, argumentation persuasiveness, and campaign competitiveness)
- ▶ Discursive campaign
 - ▶ Contextualize the ballot proposal as a broad social/political/economic choice
- ▶ Campaign issue-linkages
 - ▶ Linking the ballot proposal to indirectly related secondary issue(s) which are salient to voters

The status quo bias

- ▶ Direct democratic voting tends to preserve the status quo
 - ▶ Suppose that the majority of the electorate is against the status quo (i.e., reform-oriented)
 - ▶ Yet, different groups of pro-reform voters may oppose the status quo for different reasons
 - ▶ A particular ballot (i.e., specific reform proposal), which is favored by some but not by all reform-oriented voters, may fail to win the votes of all reform-minded supporters
- ▶ Additionally, the difficulty of vote trading in direct democracy
 - ▶ Necessary compromise and concession in order to move forward...

Discussions

- ▶ What are the differences between direct and representative democratic voting behavior?
- ▶ Which model(s) of voting behavior is/are more convincing to you?
- ▶ Why is direct democracy sometimes accused of being too conservative?
- ▶ What is the difference between the normative arguments for direct democracy and the empirical models of direct voting behavior?

Suggested Reading for next week's class

- ▶ Leduc, Lawrence (2003) 'Ch. 1: Referendums in Democratic Societies', *The Politics of Direct Democracy: Referendums in Global Perspective*, Broadview Press.