Political Corruption, Electoral Control, and Mass Media*

Takanori Adachi†   Yoichi Hizen‡

This version: January 22, 2010

Abstract

This paper studies the role of mass media in watching a corrupt behavior by a politician in a retrospective voting model. Specifically, we consider the situation where there are two types of a politician, (i) an "opportunistic" type who always pursues his or her own interest, and (ii) a "noble" type who always pursues the public interest, and voters do not exactly know of which type he or she is. We first show that, without mass media, if the private rent from a corrupt behavior has a moderate size, then there is a unique perfect Bayesian equilibrium, where an "opportunistic" politician takes a corrupt action with a positive probability. We next incorporate into the model mass media that convey information (i.e., political reports) about the politician's behavior to the voters. Mass media are also either "unbiased" (the signal is conveyed as it is) or "biased", and the voters do not exactly know of which type mass media are, either. It is shown that, in the presence of mass media, the probability of corruption cannot be lower irrespective of the direction in media bias and it is higher than that in the case of no mass media only if mass media garbles the bad information to the good one. In addition, in equilibrium, the probability of the incumbent's reelection is higher in the presence of mass media.

Keywords: Political Accountability; Retrospective Voting; Media Bias.
JEL classification: D72.

---

†Graduate School of Decision Science and Technology, Tokyo Institute of Technology, O-okayama 2-12-1 W9-103, Meguro, Tokyo 152-8552, Japan. E-mail: adachi.t.ac@m.titech.ac.jp
‡Graduate School of Economics and Business Administration, Hokkaido University, North 9, West 7, Kita-ku, Sapporo, 060-0809, Japan. E-mail: hizen@econ.hokudai.ac.jp