

Do Supermajority Rules Really Deter Extremism? The Role of Electoral Competition

Daiki Kishishita* and Atsushi Yamagishi†

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Abstract

This study investigates how supermajority rules in a legislature affect electoral competition. To this end, we construct a probabilistic voting model with two policy-motivated parties. We show that supermajority rules magnify the divergence of policy platforms generated by aggregate uncertainty about the electoral outcome. Thus, supermajority rules involve an important trade-off: they induce the convergence of policies for non-committable issues while they also cause the divergence of policies for committable issues. In addition, we analyze the optimal legislative voting rule and show that the effect of the aggregate uncertainty on the optimal voting rule depends on whether its source is the large district-specific shock or the small number of competitive districts.

JEL classification: D72; C72; H11; R12

Keywords: Divergence; Probabilistic voting; Supermajority; Legislative bargaining; Geographical polarization

*Graduate School of Economics, the University of Tokyo. JSPS Research Fellow (DC1). E-mail: daiki.kishishita@gmail.com

†Graduate School of Economics, the University of Tokyo. E-mail: atsushiyamagishi.econ@gmail.com