

Committee Processes as Information Aggregation Mechanisms: Experimental Results

Charles R. Plott, Meghana Bhatt, Morgan Llewellyn

The study is focused on the ability of preference relevant information to be transferred through the operation of voting procedures. Committee decisions are studied under conditions in which the voters have no direct information about their preferences. Such information is held by non voting participants who have incentives to influence the preference of the voting committee members. Non voters cannot vote but they can make proposals. The question is whether the information held by non voters leaks through their attempts to influence the committee and as a consequence the voters become fully informed. Thus, the research asks if it is possible for the committees to resolve conflict through a process of voting equilibration while at the same time transferring information from the “insiders” to the “outsiders”.

The setting is a two dimensional space in which a unique majority rule voting equilibrium exists under conditions that all voters know with certainty the underlying state of nature. An underlying state of nature is chosen at random from a two dimensional set of possible states and all preferences depend upon the state drawn. The experiments consist of seven participants, five voting committee persons and two non voting participants who have the ability to make proposals and recommendations but cannot vote. The five voting committee persons do not know the state and thus have no direct information about their own preferences. Deliberations follow procedures similar to Roberts Rules of Order deliberate and end with a choice from the set of options. Two additional participants know the true state with certainty but their preferences are in conflict with each other and also with the voting committee members. The two additional members cannot vote but can make proposals.

The result is that the committees choose as if all members know the state with certainty. The information becomes transferred from the informed non voters to the uninformed voters even though nothing is revealed by discussion.