

When Strategic Uninformed Abstention Improves Democratic Accountability

Gento Kato
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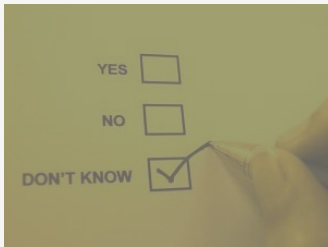
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Pessimistic views on uninformed voting

Democracy failing because **Uninformed** = **Incompetent**:

Inactive & Indecisive



Inconsistent Decision



But these are **assumptions** rather than **explanations**.

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But these are assumptions rather than explanations.

The explanation of uninformed voting

This study **explains** the **logic** and **consequences** of uninformed voting:

1. Abstention = inactivity? Possible reasons to **actively abstain** from the election (Feddersen and Pesendorfer, 1996, 1999).
2. Elites taking advantage of uninformed? Uninformed abstention **may increase the accountability** of political elites (c.f. Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita, 2014) .

Information and competence are separate constructs.

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The Voting Game

The Logic of Voting

The Accountability Game

Discussion

The utility function

Two groups of voters, g in I (**informed**) & U (**uninformed**), either **abstain** or vote to **approve** or **reject** the new policy proposal (similar to referendum).

- **Policy utility:** $q + \beta_g$ if **approved**, 0 if rejected.
 - $q \in \{-1, 1\}$ is the **quality** of new policy proposal.
 - $\beta_g \in \mathbb{R}$ is the **ideology** of voters.
- **Expressive benefit:** d weighted by the prob. of voted option being **correct** = r_g .

$$r_g = \begin{cases} \text{Approve} & \text{if } q + \beta_g > 0 \\ \text{Reject} & \text{if } q + \beta_g < 0 \end{cases}$$

- **Voting cost:** $-c$ if **voted**. $d > c$.

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What voters know & don't know

- Ideology:
 - All voters know their own ideology.
 - All voters don't know others' ideology.
Only know the probability density function $f(\beta)$.
- Policy Quality:
 - Informed voters know for sure.
 - Uninformed voters know only by probability.

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Pivotal group determines the electoral outcome

Either one group of voters is **pivotal** and determines the electoral outcome by **random** probability (e.g., Morton and Ou, 2015).

- If **voted, uninformed** voters are **pivotal by π** .
- If one group of voters **abstained, another** group of voters is **pivotal for sure**.

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Some voters don't care about the electoral outcome

If $|\beta_g| > 1$, the voters are **ideologues**. Regardless of information:

- **Approval ideologues** ($\beta_g > 1$) vote for approval
- **Rejection ideologues** ($\beta_g < -1$) vote for rejection.

If $|\beta_g| \leq 1$ and **informed**, voters always:

- Vote for **approval** if $q = 1$ (high quality)
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Ideologues and/or informed voters **never abstain**.

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Non-ideologue uninformed voters' action is conditional on ϕ

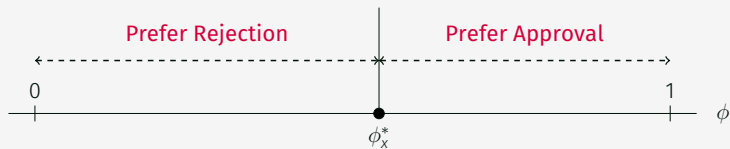
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- Prefer **approval** over rejection iff ϕ is **approval threshold** $= \phi_x^*$ or higher ($\phi_x^* = 0.5$ if $\beta_U = 0$).
- Choose **abstention** over voting iff ϕ falls within the **abstention interval** $= [\phi_{v1x0}, \phi_{v1x1}]$.

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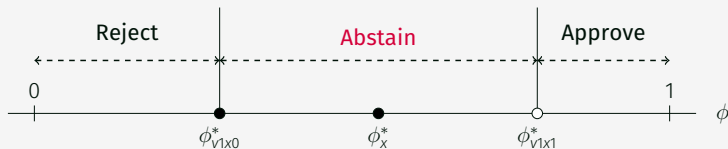
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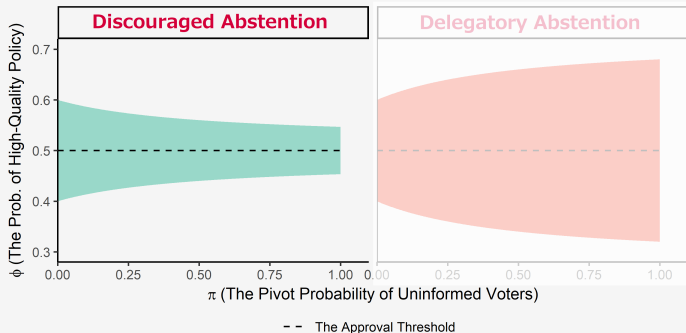
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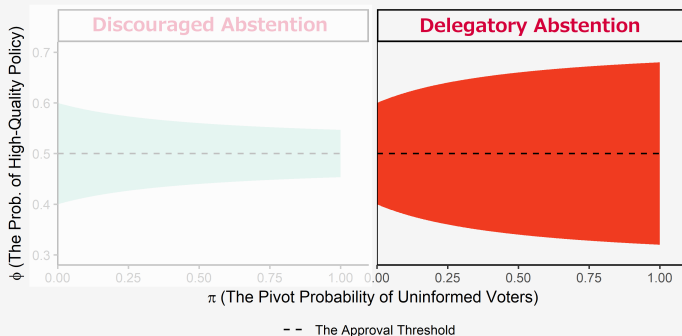
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Patterns of uninformed abstention



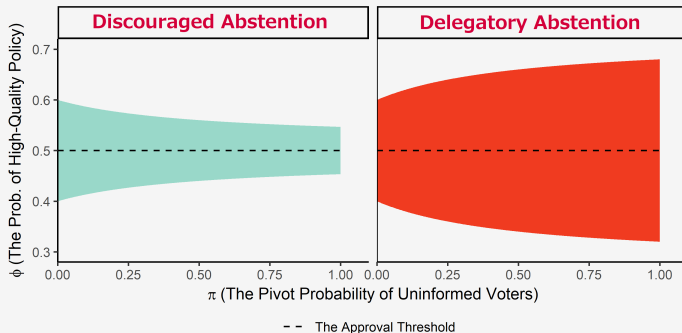
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- **Mixed:** In between discouraged and delegatory.

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Explaining the context of uninformed abstention

Abstention occurs with **discouraged** motivation when:

- **Low expressive benefit** (d) &/or **high voting cost** (c).
- **High** probability of (informed) **ideologues**.

Abstention occurs with **delegatory** motivation when:

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Policymaker determines the policy quality

Policymaker set policy quality $\phi = Pr(q = 1) \in [0, 1]$.

- **Policy approval benefit:** $B = 2$ only when approved. Policymaker wants to appear effective.
- **Policy formulation cost:** 0 for low quality policy ($q = -1$). For high quality policy ($q = 1$):
 - $\eta_H = 1$ then **high capacity (H)** type.
 - $\eta_L = 2$ then **low capacity (L)** type.

p = prior prob. of high capacity policymaker.

Simplify by limiting $\beta_g \in \{R < -1, 0, A > 1\}$.

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The equilibrium behavior of the policymaker

Low capacity \Rightarrow always chooses low quality policy.

High capacity \Rightarrow prefers high quality policy only when the quality increases the likelihood of approval.

- If $\pi = 0$ (informed voters pivotal), H chooses:

$$\phi_H^* = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if prob. of ideologues} < 0.5 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

- If $\pi > 0$ (uninformed voters potentially pivotal), H is less certain about the outcome of their decision. H may change his decision when...

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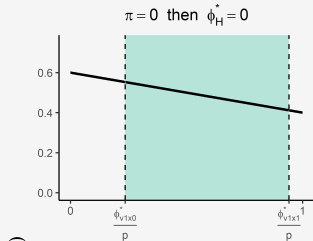
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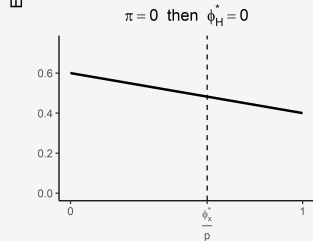
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Uninformed voters can increase accountability

The Discouraged Abstention Context ($d = 0.5$, $c = 0.4$)



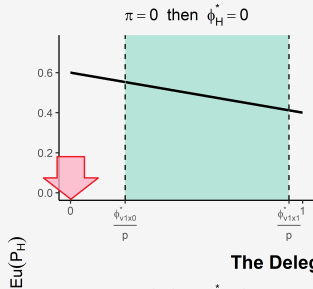
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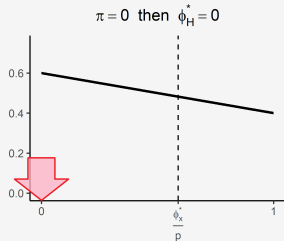
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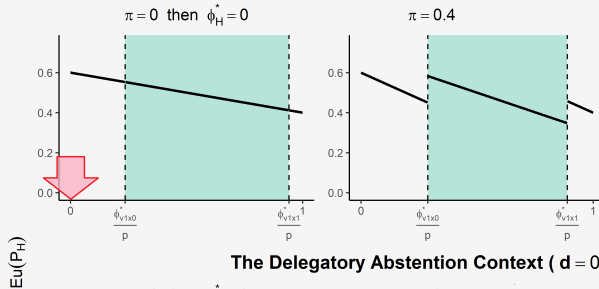
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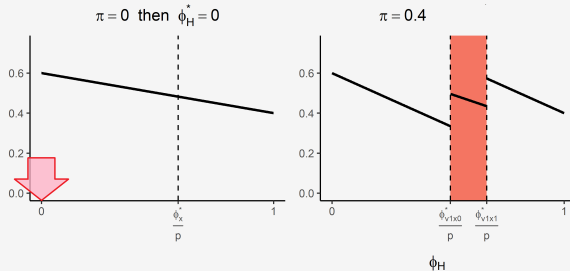
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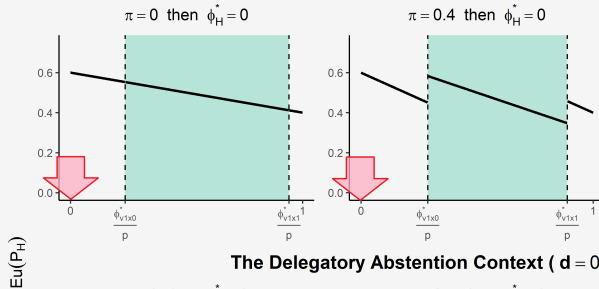


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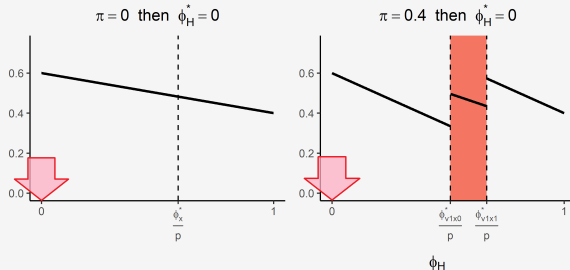


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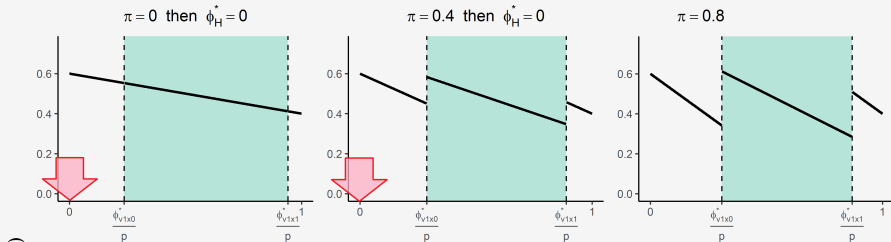


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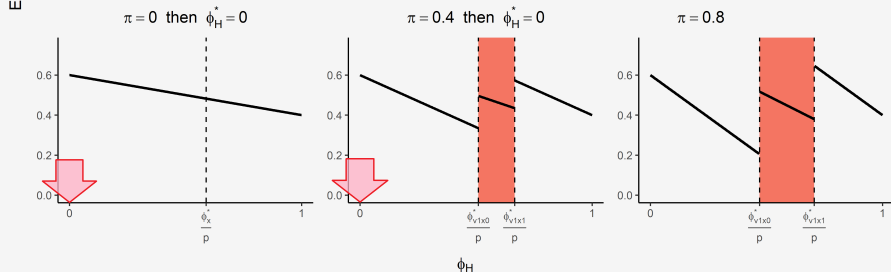


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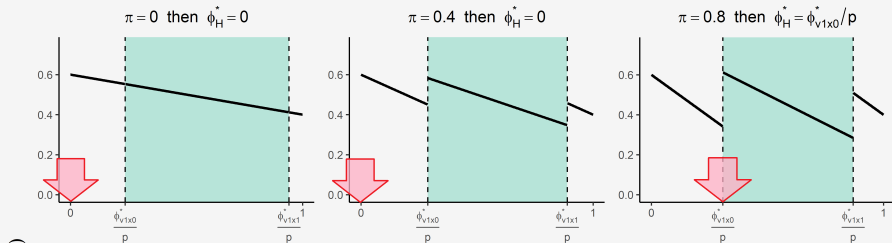


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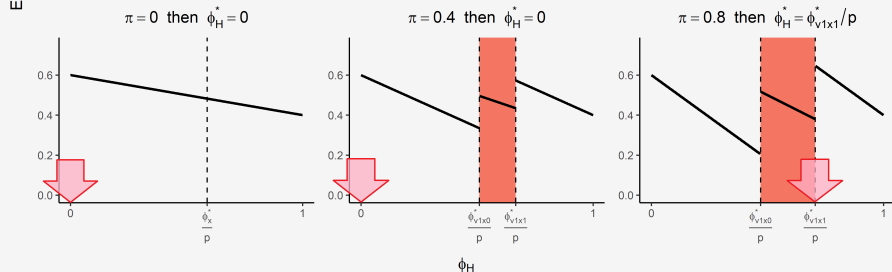


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Explaining the context of accountability improvement

Improvement **never occurs** under **prob. of ideologues** < 0.5 . Otherwise...

H sets $\phi_H^* = \phi^{v1x0}/p$ instead of $\phi_H^* = 0$ for high π when:

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 \Rightarrow discouraged abstention context.

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The Voting Game

The Logic of Voting

The Accountability Game

Discussion

Reevaluating the implication of uninformed abstention

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The increasing presence of uninformed voters can **improve accountability**, especially under **delegatory** abstention context.

Depending on **the context of election**, uninformed voters are not necessarily incompetent.

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Thank you for listening!

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Non-ideologue uninformed voters' action is conditional on ϕ

If $|\beta_g| \leq 1$ and **uninformed**, decision is conditional on $Pr(q = 1) = \phi$.

- **Approval threshold.** If voted, **approve** iff:

$$\phi \geq \phi_x^* = \frac{1}{2} - \frac{\pi\beta_U}{2(\pi + d)}$$

- **Abstention Interval.** **Abstain** iff ϕ falls between:

$$\phi_{v1x0}^* = \min \left\{ \phi_x^*, \frac{\pi\kappa_{l:app}(1 - \beta_U) + d - c}{\pi((1 - \kappa_{l:rej})(1 + \beta) + \kappa_{l:app}(1 - \beta_U)) + d} \right\}$$

and

$$\phi_{v1x1}^* = \max \left\{ \phi_x^*, \frac{\pi(1 - \kappa_{l:app})(1 - \beta_U) + c}{\pi(\kappa_{l:rej}(1 + \beta_U) + (1 - \kappa_{l:app})(1 - \beta_U)) + d} \right\}$$