Committee Structure in Bicameral Legislatures

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September 3, 2015
Committee Structures in Bicameral Legislatures

- Committees are policy advisors (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1990)
- Committees also play an important role in bargaining with the other chamber (Gailmard and Hammond 2011)
In Our Model: The Optimal Committee Structure

- A chamber proposes a bill and another chamber receives it for consideration.
- To be approved, bills have to be supported by a majority of the committee members and a majority of the legislators in the chamber.
- Each legislator has an ideal point and *short-run* (non-spatial) interests.
Takeaway Point

In Bicameral Legislatures:

1. **Chamber likely to be proposer**: create *representative* committee

2. **Chamber likely to be receiver**: create *unrepresentative* committee
Sequence of Decisions

1. Two chambers, $L$ and $U$.
2. Each chamber chooses a committee structure $S = (S_L, S_U)$.
3. Nature then recognizes a chamber to propose a bill:
   - With probability $\pi \in [0, 1]$, chamber $L$ is the proposer ($p = L$)
   - With probability $1 - \pi$, chamber $U$ is the proposer ($p = U$)
4. Chamber $p$ proposes a bill $b_p \in \mathbb{R}$
5. A majority of $S_p$ and of $N_p$ either approve $b_p$, or $b_p$ is rejected
6. If $b_p$ is approved, then the other chamber, $c$, considers $b_p$
   - $b_p$ is enacted if a majority of the members of $S_c$ and $N_c$ approve it
   - Otherwise, $b_p$ is rejected
7. Game ends, payoffs received.
Payoffs

Legislator $i$’s payoff from enacting $b_p$ is

$$u_i(P = 1, b_p, \tau_i) = -|x_i - b_p| + y_i,$$

and her payoff from the bill failing is

$$u_i(P = 0, b_p, \tau_i) = -|x_i|.$$

- $P$ captures if the bill passed ($P = 1$) or not ($P = 0$)
- $\tau_i = (x_i, y_i)$ is legislator $i$’s type
- $x_i$ is legislator $i$’s ideal point
- $y_i$ is legislator $i$’s short-run interests

The term $y_i$ represents $i$’s non-spatial incentives such as the desire to claim credit for something, or perhaps be seen as “doing something.”
Chamber-Wide Common Shocks Model

- If $\pi \leq 1/2 \rightarrow$ chamber should choose a committee that is representative of the chamber’s floor median’s ideal point
- If $\pi > 1/2$ and $y_U \leq \delta \rightarrow$ chamber should choose a committee that is \textit{not representative} of the chamber’s floor median’s ideal point
- If $\pi > 1/2$ and $y_U > \delta \rightarrow$ chamber should choose a committee that is \textit{divergent from} but \textit{moves with} the chamber’s floor median’s ideal point
Two Implications from the Chamber-Wide Common Shocks Model

- A chamber will choose an representative committee if it is likely to propose to the other chamber.
- A chamber will choose an unrepresentative committee if it is likely to be proposed to by the other chamber.
Empirical Strategy: Variation in *Proposal Powers* across chambers

**Table:** Variations in Proposal Powers Across Chambers in Bicameral Legislatures in the Americas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Lower Chamber</th>
<th>Upper Chamber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>budget, taxes</td>
<td>provincial &amp; regional development, <em>coparticipación</em>, international treaties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>budget, taxes, development, loans, military intervention</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>budget, presidential initiatives</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>budget, taxes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>budget, taxes</td>
<td>international treaties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>taxes, income law, loans</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>budget, departmental &amp; municipal legislation</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>taxes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>budget</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empirical Strategy

- Lower chamber of Argentina
  - Originating Committee (Appropriations)
  - Receiving Committee (Regional Development)
  - Two Way Committees
- 11 legislative periods between 1984 and 2007
- Over 14,000 committee assignments
In 5 out of 6 legislative periods the *receiving committee* was further from the chamber median than the *originating committee*.
Committee Medians and the Median Legislator during One Period of Divided Control Single Party Control over both Chambers

In 5 out of 5 legislative periods the *receiving committee* was *not* further from the chamber median than the *originating committee*
Conclusion

- Takeaway point
- Implications for the interaction between a President and an unicameral assembly
- Future work