Editorial

Editor's Introduction

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Interest in politics and the political process—topics that economists consider to be the purview of the sub-field of study known as public choice—appears to be as high as ever. This edited volume, *Public Choice*, provides a collection of high-quality studies covering many of the varied topics traditionally investigated in the growing field of public choice economics. These include, but are not limited to, voting/voters, elections, constitutions, legislatures, executives, judiciaries, bureaucracy, special interest groups, parliamentary procedures, government failure, rent seeking, public finance, and international organizations. In bringing these topics together in one place, this volume offers a nice mix of conceptual/formal and empirical studies in public choice economics.

The study by J.R. Clark, of the University of Tennessee—Chattanooga, and Dwight Lee, of Southern Methodist University, re-considers the conclusions of a well-known test by Geoffrey Brennan and Loren Lomasky of instrumental voting (Brennan and Lomasky 1993), a concept indicating that as presidential elections become close, the probability of a tie, and of casting a decisive vote, increases "multi-billionfold", resulting in a large increase in voter turnout. As reported in their 25-year old study, Brennan and Lomasky failed to find a relationship between closeness and turnout in presidential elections since 1940, thus leading to their rejection of the instrumental voter hypothesis. Clark and Lee (2018) do not dispute the results of the Brennan-Lomasky test, only their arguments about the reason for the results.

Clark and Lee (2018) assert that expressive voting is the most reasonable explanation for why large-participation elections occur. As they argue, once an expressive voter has developed a political ideology that allows him or her to acquire a sense of moral virtue at little personal cost at the polls, that voter has little motivation to seek out information that might call his or her own political beliefs into question. In this regard, arguments hostile to one's political beliefs can be, and typically are, easily neutralized by confirmation bias, which is widely recognized as having a strong influence on voting decisions. According to Clark and Lee (2018), the prevalence of confirmation bias in voting runs counter to the concept of instrumental voting, given that instrumental voters should be more open to arguments indicating that their political beliefs are mistaken.

In his piece on constitutional constraints, Randall Holcombe of Florida State University points out that "the literature in constitutional economics has focused heavily on the design of effective rules to prevent the abuse of government power, and to facilitate government production that benefits the general population rather than concentrated special interests," while it "has focused less on the design of institutions that are able to effectively enforce those rules." Holcombe (2018) states that the question of enforcement begins with interpretation (e.g., laws are often intentionally vague), and includes selectivity (e.g., some laws are enforced to the benefit of enforcers) and oversight (e.g., rent-seeking and regulatory capture work to the detriment of oversight).

In describing the issues associated with interpretation, selectivity, and oversight in rules enforcement, Holcombe's study combines public choice theory with elite theory, which defines the "power elite" as those few at the top of a democratic society "who make the public policies to which everyone else is required to conform." As Holcombe (2018) points out, "[e]lite theory explains who designs and controls public policy, but it does not explain how they are able to exercise this

control," while "[p]ublic choice theory explains how some are able to use the system for their benefit at the expense of others, but it does not identify who those some are . . . [Ultimately,] the elite make public policy, so one should expect that when they find themselves relatively unconstrained, public policy works to the advantage of the elite." While the power held by elites necessitates rules, problems surrounding interpretation, selectivity, and oversight lead Holcombe (2018) to conclude that checks and balances within government are essential to rules enforcement.

As Holcombe (2018) asserts, a necessary condition for checks and balances is a separation of powers, whereby the different branches of government should be designed so that they have conflicting interests, but must reach an agreement (i.e., they cannot act unilaterally) to take collective action. The system of checks and balances works, as Holcombe (2018) concludes, on "the principle that the individual branches of government guard their powers from being usurped by other branches," wherein "[t]he key feature here is that some elites check and balance the power of others."

The study by Miguel Martínez-Panero and Teresa Peña of Universidad de Valladolid, Verónica Arredondo of Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, and Victoriano Ramírez of Universidad de Granada takes a slightly more formal approach to the issue of electoral disproportionality, which exists when the notion of proportional representation is extended to a single legislative seat that cannot be divided between competing candidates. As a result of electoral disproportionality, some political parties are ultimately overrepresented, while others are underrepresented.

Researchers have attempted to address these distortions with disproportionality indexes, which, in many cases, are based on exact proportionality, something that is unaffordable in practice. Martínez-Panero et al. (2019) develop a new disproportionality index that entails a more realistic requirement, that "[n]o party's representation should deviate from its quota ([i.e.,] the number of seats that should be received by the parties in exact proportionality) by more than one unit." The new index measures only non-forced disproportionality (i.e., where the quota rule is not satisfied, which is usually the case), avoiding that portion of disproportionality inherent to the fact that exact proportionality is not feasible.

Another formal approach is presented by João Ricardo Faria of Florida Atlantic University and Daniel Arce of the University of Texas, Dallas in their study, motivated by the United States' recent opening of relations with Cuba under President Barack Obama's administration, on the relationship between foreign aid and freedom. More specifically, Faria and Arce (2018) present an extension of the two-period Samaritan's Dilemma game in order to analyze the potential for foreign aid to promote freedom, particularly in cases of dictatorships that might welcome economic growth but that are opposed to economic and political freedoms (i.e., the Samaritan's Dilemma).

Faria and Arce (2018) consider three different types of aid policies—one targeted on the recipient's economic performance, one coupling aid with freedom, and one targeted on the recipient's economic performance indirectly by way of pro-entrepreneurship reforms. These aid policies are combined with each of two policymaking environments—Stackelberg (leader-follower), which is most closely associated with the Samaritan's Dilemma within two-period settings, and Nash. In these contexts, Faria and Arce (2018) show that a Stackelberg policy environment that couples aid with freedom neither resolves the Samaritan's Dilemma nor fosters freedom, while a Nash policy environment that couples aid with freedom resolves the Samaritan's Dilemma but it does not commensurately increase freedoms within the recipient nation. Their final consideration—Nash play (representing donor commitment) and an explicitly freedom-based policy—succeeds at resolving both the Samaritan's Dilemma and increasing freedoms, provided that the donor tempers its altruistic motivation for supporting the recipient, especially in cases where the recipient is willing to test the donor's resolve.

The study by Raúl Pérez-Fernández and Bernard De Baets of Ghent University, and José Luis García-Lapresta of Universidad de Valladolid provides a bridge from the conceptual and more formal pieces in this volume to the empirical public choice studies included herein. These researchers analyze the 2017 Rector election at Ghent University, which covered 59 days between the first round of voting and the final round of voting. This study begins with a discussion of the differences between simple

majority, the closely related concept of absolute majority, and other forms of qualified majority, such as unanimous majority. Among other regulatory features, the Ghent University Rector elections rely on a supermajority of two-thirds of the vote for a winner (or winning duo) to be declared. The Rector elections, described by Pérez-Fernández et al. (2019), are set to go no more than five rounds without declaring a winner, in which case the elections are restarted.

Pérez-Fernández et al. (2019) provide some solutions to the lengthy situation that occurred at Ghent University. One is a multi-stage process, wherein something slightly greater than a simple majority (e.g., 52%) determines the outcome in the first stage, and in the second stage the process implements the two-thirds supermajority. As they point out, such a procedure "will . . . 'guarantee' . . . a winner being selected after some voting rounds, while not electing a candidate that has just one more vote than its adversary." These researchers also suggest that "a more elegant solution would require . . . totally reformulat[ing] the semantics of the election in an approval-voting fashion." Pérez-Pérez-Fernández et al. (2019) ultimately favor a process referred to as "majority judgment," which is based on what they state is "a common language of . . . labels in a linearly ordered scale [that] needs to be agreed upon, [a]fter [which] each of the voters is required to evaluate each of the candidates independently according to this common language of [labels . . . which] are ordered in an increasing manner." As they conclude, this process is easy for voters to understand and avoids other issues, such as irrelevant alternatives and voting cycles.

The empirical studies contained in this volume include my own piece on the stability of political ideology with Chandini Sankaran of Boston College and Kamal Upadhyaya of the University of New Haven. Our study extends the political science and political psychology literature on the political ideology of lawmakers by employing Nokken-Poole scores (Nokken and Poole 2004) of legislators' political ideology for members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate who were elected prior to the 103rd Congress that began in early 1991 and who served consecutively through the 115th Congress, which ended in early 2019. These unidimensional policy scores assume that each Congress is entirely separate in terms of a legislator's political ideology, and they allow for movement of legislators along the unidimensional policy space from Congress to Congress.

As we indicate in the study (Mixon et al. 2019), our empirical investigation of the stability of political ideology of lawmakers is two-pronged. First, we investigate the political instability at the individual level by collecting both the largest and smallest Nokken-Poole scores over each U.S. Representative's legislative career. These are used to compute the absolute deviation in political ideology (over time) for each lawmaker, where smaller (larger) values represent greater stability (instability) of political ideology. An alternative approach to investigating the stability of political ideology of lawmakers relies on regression analysis, employing a legislator's Nokken-Poole scores. The results in Mixon et al. (2019) suggest that political ideology is unstable over time for a sizable portion of the long-serving members of both major political parties in the U.S. Congress. These results run somewhat counter to the finding in prior studies that the political ideologies of lawmakers and other political elites are stable over time.

An empirical study by Jessi Troyan of the Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy and Joshua Hall of West Virginia University explores the specific factors that determine federal spending on environmental goods, and whether severity of the hazard is the only metric of consideration, or if other factors play an important role in explaining spending. These issues are explored within the context of the Abandoned Mine Land Fund (AMLF) program in the U.S., a fund created as a feature of the *Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977*. As they indicate, "this analytical setting is interesting because of the limited scope of program objectives and the rigidly defined funding source . . . [, which] . . . suggests that the execution of abandoned mine reclamation projects facilitated by the fund should be difficult to influence politically."

Troyan and Hall (2019) explore whether political factors, such as environmental interest group influence, legislator preferences and pressures to fund sites in their home states or districts, and environmental and health factors, play an explanatory role in disbursement of AMLF monies. Analysis

of some relatively large data sets suggests that funding for abandoned mine reclamation is a mixture of the products of public and political interests, particularly regarding tenure on the Senate Appropriations Committee and state-ownership of lands, and whether the AMLF coffers are supported by the U.S. Treasury Department. They find that "after the allocations out of Treasury funds are capped to states, the political influence wanes and the hazard level of sites again becomes the primary influential factor in funding receipts—further bolstering a public interest view of the AML program in total." As Troyan and Hall (2019) conclude, this result supports the notion that political institutions can be changed to remove politics.

As Zachary Klingensmith of Pennsylvania State University—Erie explains in the introduction of his study, "targeted [government] expenditures, which are also called pork-barrel spending, allow incumbents to both *credit claim* and *advertise* simultaneously through three channels." Klingensmith (2019) is primarily concerned with the third of these channels, which is whether an incumbent can use pork-barrel spending to increase his or her ability to advertise through campaign contributions. His study extends the literature on on pork-barrel spending and campaign contributions, mainly by investigating whether the timing of the pork-barrel appropriations matter, and whether general federal appropriations have the same impact on fundraising as pork-barrel spending.

In order to investigate these issues, Klingensmith (2019) focuses on United States Senate elections from 2004 to 2018, rather than a single election. The results of his analyses indicate that (1) "pork-barrel spending can have a positive and significant impact on fundraising," (2) "the timing of the pork-barrel spending matters[, with] . . . only pork-barrel spending in the election year . . . hav[ing] an impact on campaign contributions," and (3) "the relationship between federal aid to states and incumbent fundraising is ambiguous[, although] . . . it is clear that the amount of fundraising per dollar of pork-barrel spending is far greater than the amount of fundraising per dollar of federal aid." The overall conclusion from Klingensmith's study is "that pork-barrel spending is used as a source of political capital for both politicians and political entrepreneurs."

Candon Johnson and Joshua Hall of West Virginia University point out that the sports economics literature has generally found that new professional sport facilities do not generate any new net economic activity. Their study "provide[s] context to this literature by exploring the public choice in the public financing of stadiums," with particular attention to the two 2016 ballot measures related to the San Diego Chargers (NFL franchise). More specifically, Johnson and Hall (2019) analyze voting on two ballot measures that would, respectively, allow officials to raise hotel taxes to pay for a new downtown stadium for the Chargers, and allow officials to raise hotel taxes, but would also explicitly prevent any money being spent on the Chargers. Neither of these ballot measures received 50% of the total votes cast.

The results of their empirical analyses indicate that populations in "zip codes with a higher voter turnout were more likely to vote against both measures, highlighting the importance of the timing of referenda in limiting the ability of clearly defined groups, such as Chargers fans, to have a large influence on the voting outcome," and that "areas with more Trump voters were more likely to support higher taxes for the purpose of building the Chargers a new stadium." With regard to this latter finding, Johnson and Hall (2019) state that the "results suggest that Trump voters were against tax increases for these public projects; but, if taxes were going to be raised, they wanted the Chargers to be part of the deal."

Finally, my study (Mixon 2018) on the 2017 U.S. Senate Special Election in Alabama extends the public choice literature on localism (i.e., "friends and neighbors") in voting, which occurs as a way of mitigating the agency costs of representative democracy, by investigating the impact on localism of political scandal. Prior literature in this genre places the home area advantage, or the advantage to local candidates, somewhere between 2.4 and 12.4 percentage points, with the most common estimate residing near five percentage points. The Republican candidate in this election, Roy Moore, gained notoriety during the 2017 campaign when a number of women alleged to national media that as

teenagers they were subject to sexual advances by Moore, who was then in his early 30s and serving as a local assistant district attorney.

Econometric results presented in Mixon (2018) suggest that a candidate who is embroiled in political scandal suffers an erosion in the usual friends-and-neighbors effect on his or her local vote share in a general election. In this particular case, the scandal hanging over Moore, who lost the election contest to Democratic candidate Doug Jones, eroded all of the friends-and-neighbors effect that would have been expected (i.e., about five percentage points) in Moore's home county, as well as about 40% of the advantage Moore had at home over his opponent in terms of constituent political ideology. As the study concludes, "the exploration of the impact of political scandal on friends-and-neighbors voting undertaken in this study indicates that, this genre of the public choice literature is perhaps under-theorized, thus, opening up avenues for future research."

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