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Malapportionment and Multilateral Bargaining: An Experiment¹

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Abstract

Members of collective decision-making bodies often represent communities that differ in population sizes. Malapportionment results when decision-making power is not allocated evenly across the population. Two well known institutions with malapportionment have emerged: bicameralism and weighted voting. This paper studies experimentally how agenda setting power affects the distribution of resources, comparing across those two institutions. Conventional wisdom suggests that malapportionment favors scarcely populated states. I find that this is the case under weighted voting, but not necessarily in a bicameral system. In the later case, the allocation of agenda setting power can be used to eliminate distortions stemming from malapportionment.

1. Introduction

Members of collective decision-making bodies often represent communities which differ in population size. Such heterogeneities present a problem of committee design: how is decision-making power to be allocated in order to avoid the concern that larger communities systematically impose their will on the rest? Malapportionment results when decision-making power is not allocated evenly across the population. Currently, more than one-third of the legislatures in the democratic world were designed to reflect explicit malapportionment

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