

Multitask, Accountability, and Institutional Design

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Abstract

We consider a model of political accountability that allows us to examine the implications of unified vs. divided executive authority for the welfare of voters. The government is responsible for different tasks and the voter attempts to learn about the task-specific competences of the incumbent leader(s) in order to make electoral decisions. We identify a variety of trade-offs that shed light on the conditions under which it is optimal to bundle the tasks into a single elected office or unbundle the tasks into separate elected offices. Voter welfare is multi-faceted: voters care both about the strength of the incentives they create for politicians to take good actions and about identifying and retaining high quality politicians, creating the possibility for trade-offs in the institutional comparison. We show that as voter welfare puts greater weight on a particular task or as a politician's task-specific competences become more highly correlated, unbundling becomes more desirable relative to bundling with respect to creating incentives, but less desirable with respect to selecting high quality politicians. For some configurations of parameter values there is an unambiguously optimal institutional arrangement. For other configurations of parameter values, the optimal institutional arrangement depends on the relative weights placed on the two elements of voter welfare.