Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:FS 2017

Department:Political Science

Degree:PhD

Title:Agendas and Committees in American State Legislatures: The Causes and Consequences of Matching Priorities with Institutional Roles

Legislative scholars largely agree on the importance of the committee system in the legislative process. Committees are generally considered the primary locus of lawmaking activity and individual legislators see them as important for accomplishing their goals. In this dissertation I argue that the value of committee assignments to a legislator is entirely dependent on the legislator's policy priorities. For example, assignment to the Agriculture Committee should be of more value to legislators with interests in agricultural policy than those unconcerned with such policy. I devise a means of measuring the degree of this match between priorities and assignments and demonstrate that legislators with better matches are more effective in their chambers. Further, I identify the ways in which individual characteristics and institutions shape opportunities for matching across a sample of American state legislatures. This research shifts the focus away from aggregate measures of committee assignment value and demonstrates the utility of thinking about the particularized benefits accrued through assignment politics.