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Distorted Issue Space and People's Choice

There are two tales of issue voting model: Proximity and Directional model. The controversy surrounding these models remains an ongoing discussion in the literature. In an attempt to address this issue, I unify these models and propose a new one, elastic proximity model. This model does not attempt to adjust utility functions or candidates or parties' positions; rather, it restructures voters' issue space at the recognition level. Previous models assume the distance between two adjoining points is constant, while that of new issue space is elastic.

To confirm the latter, I estimate elasticity parameters using data from a survey experiment in the first part. The results indicate that voters have an issue space that differs from that measured in observational data. Furthermore, I show that the new unified model performs better than not only traditional models but also existing unified ones. The results imply that rational voters may make irrational decisions when issue space at the recognition level is distorted.

An extent of elasticity may be heterogeneous among the voters. In the last part, I conduct two analyses to clarify determinants of an extent of elasticity. The results show that the variance of the elasticity parameters can be explained by an individual factor---political sophistication---and context factors---the number of parties, press freedom, and the electoral cycle.