

Abstract:

In the 2016 U.S. presidential election a large number of voters appeared to be motivated to vote for one of the candidates by strong dislike of other candidate. Moreover, even if one candidate was preferred to the other in a relative sense, the relatively preferred candidate was seen as insufficiently attractive to induce voters to vote for her. We consider such voter "alienation" and how it induces extremism on the part of candidates who themselves have no ideological bent. We show that even if voters are polarized, voting simply on the basis of relative preference for candidates does not induce candidates to be extreme. In contrast, when alienation is an issue, voter polarization leads to equilibria where candidates take extreme positions on opposite sides of the policy spectrum. That is, voter alienation implies that strategies favoring the centrist median voter are no longer equilibria even if candidates are only office-motivated.