

# Electoral Competition with Rationally Inattentive Voters\*

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## Abstract

This paper studies how voters optimally allocate costly attention in a model of probabilistic voting. The equilibrium solves a modified social planning problem that reflects voters' choice of attention. Voters are more attentive when their stakes are higher, when their cost of information is lower and prior uncertainty is higher. We explore the implications of this in a variety of applications. In equilibrium, extremist voters are more influential and public goods are under-provided. The analysis also yields predictions about the equilibrium pattern of information, and about policy divergence by two opportunistic candidates. Endogenous attention can lead to multiple equilibria, explaining how poor voters in developing countries can be politically empowered by welfare programs.

Keywords: electoral competition, limited inattention.

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