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Summaries

Decision making on the nuclear power plant in Borssele: An analysis of the voting paradox in Dutch politics

By Noël Vergunst

Political decisions in democratic systems depend on the preferences of voters. The aggregation of individual preferences into a social choice can take place on the basis of a social choice rule, such as the majority rule. This majority rule, however, can result in a cyclical social preference, as becomes evident in the case of the voting paradox. Although many scholars have written about the phenomenon of the voting paradox, little is known about the frequency with which such a paradox occurs in decision making procedures. Numerous examples have been found of voting paradoxes in committee and parliamentary decision making. Examples of cycles in elections involving a mass electorate, however, have been rare. In this article, an example of the voting paradox is analysed. In November 1994, Dutch Parliament discussed the modernization of the nuclear power plant in Borssele. The preferences of the Members of Parliament about three distinct options have been reconstructed. Application of the majority rule on these preferences is shown to lead to a top cycle in social preferences. This can be seen as a good example of the way in which the voting paradox can occur in Dutch politics.

Dutch import policy on tropical woods: Towards a new framework of analysis of foreign economic policy

By Hadewych Hazelzet

While international trade gains in importance in determining the relationships between countries, neither scholars nor politicians pay much attention to foreign economic policy in the Netherlands. This article investigates to what extent the dominant school of thought in international relations, neo-realism, is able to explain matters of international political economy. An alternative framework of analysis is offered, incorporating variables at an international, national and societal level. An analysis of the decisionmaking process around the Dutch import policy on tropical woods shows that pressure from the international system can only determine policy outcome if it is supported by crucial politicians.

Whither political phone canvassing?

By Hans Anker

Does it make sense for political parties to approach potential voters by phone? According to campaign professionals it does, while academic scholars tend to have a more skeptical view. The current study attempts to answer this question by exploring the effects of a phone canvass project organized by the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) in conjunction with the Provincial Elections held on March 8, 1995. The canvass interviews took place in two towns: Eindhoven and Zoetermeer. In addition to the 'standard' electoral effects in terms of turnout and party choice, the study also focused on effects in terms of political involvement and respondents' readiness to engage in activities revolving around the Labour Party. Electoral effects turned out to be absent (both in terms of turnout and party choice), while the phone canvass had a significant positive effect on citizens' political involvement. No effects were found for Labour Party activities. For the most part, these results support theoretical expectations. These findings suggest that most political parties are ill-advised to engage in canvass activities, but at the same time underscore the role of political parties as important vehicles for generating vibrant political communities.

Why head towards Economic and Monetary Union? Perceptions of EMU in the United Kingdom, France and Germany

By Amy Verdun

Why has Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) been so easily accepted in the European Community (EC) in the late 1980s and early 1990s? This article investigates why several domestic political actors – i.e. central banks, ministries of finance, employers' organizations and trade unions – in three major EC countries favoured the adoption of the EMU proposals. The article traces the similarities and differences of these perceptions of EMU as derived from elite interviews held with monetary experts in 1991 and 1992. It compares these perceptions with five explanations derived from political science which state why the EMU-project was accepted so easily. Although the five general explanations were set up on the basis of the position of national governments they also help to understand the perceptions of EMU of the domestic actors. It is argued, however, that each of the actors had his own specific reasons for favouring (or at least not opposing) EMU. The EMU package deal and the Maastricht Treaty provided something for everybody.