

# HELENA P. ATEN

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Department of Economics

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**Graduate Student Coordinator:** Barbara Kalabinski [bhk@georgetown.edu](mailto:bhk@georgetown.edu) (202) 687-6260

## EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Economics **Georgetown University** May 2010 (expected)

Thesis Title: *Informed Politicians and Institutional Stability*

M.A. in Economics **Georgetown University** January 2006

M.Sc. in Economics **University College London** November 2004

B.A. in Economics and Mathematics **Dartmouth College** May 2003

## AREAS OF INTEREST

*Primary fields* Political Economy, Microeconomic Theory

*Secondary fields* Applied Econometrics, Industrial Organization

## TEACHING AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

*Instructor* Microeconomic Theory Summer 2008

*Teaching Assistant* Graduate Microeconomic Theory II Spring 2008, 2009

Graduate Microeconomic Theory I Fall 2006, 2007

Introduction to Econometrics Spring 2006

Game Theory Fall 2005

Principles of Macroeconomics Spring 2005

Principles of Microeconomics Fall 2004

*Research Assistant* Profs. Luca Anderlini & Roger Lagunoff Spring 2007, Fall 2008

## WORKING PAPERS

- “Competing Informed Principals and Representative Democracy” (**JOB MARKET PAPER**)
- “The Likelihood of Institutional Change Across Political Institutions: Evidence from Cross-Country Panel Data”

## WORK IN PROGRESS

- “Redistributive Policy Under Uncertainty”, with T. Renee Bowen
- “Information Exchange among Heterogeneous Voters”

## CONFERENCE AND SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS

- Georgetown University Micro Seminar October 2009
- Stony Brook Game Theory Conference July 2009
- North American Econometric Society Summer Meeting June 2009
- Southern Economic Association Meetings November 2008
- Midwest Economic Theory Meeting May 2008
- Midwest Economic Association Meetings March 2008

## AWARDS AND GRANTS

- Razin Prize (for best dissertation or research paper in Economics at Georgetown University) 2010
- Georgetown University Merit-Based Teaching Assistantship 2004 – present
- Georgetown University Conference Travel Grant Spring 2008

## TECHNICAL SKILLS

- Gauss, Stata, Matlab, Mathematica, LaTeX, and MS Office
- Bilingual in English and Chinese (Cantonese), proficient in Mandarin

## THESIS COMMITTEE AND REFERENCES

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## DISSERTATION PAPERS

### *“Competing Informed Principals and Representative Democracy” (Job Market Paper)*

This paper studies the welfare implications of politicians who assume either the role of delegates or trustees in a representative democracy, and identifies conditions under which the latter is preferable to the former. In this model, voters are uninformed about the value of a policy-relevant state. Two informed politicians compete for votes by committing to state-contingent policy platforms that may or may not reveal information about the underlying state. After the election, the winning politician announces the state and implements the relevant policy.

In an equilibrium in which the electoral process induces the politicians to reveal the state, the winning politician's only role is to implement the part of the policy platform consistent with the state, and her choice of policy in the true state is the one preferred by the pivotal voter. This resembles the model of delegate representation. In an equilibrium in which neither politician reveals information in the electoral process, the winning politician withholds the information she has until the policy-making stage, and is given discretion in policy implementation. This resembles the model of trustee representation.

We find that if voters' policy preferences are not too sensitive to changes in the state, then the two politicians offer divergent policy platforms. In particular, it is possible for voters to get a relatively high payoff in equilibrium while receiving a public good that they less prefer given the state. The main result characterizes Perfect Bayesian Equilibria in which the offered platforms are non-revealing menu contracts, and the resulting welfare is higher than in any separating equilibrium. Such is the case when voters are sufficiently valence-driven, and private benefits to politicians are sufficiently important. The result provides a welfare explanation for why voters may defer policy choices to an elected representative, rather than select a politician that reflects their policy preferences based on information revealed in political competition.

### *“The Likelihood of Institutional Change Across Political Institutions: Evidence from Cross-Country Panel Data” (Work in Progress)*

This paper explores whether there are systematic differences in institutional stability between democracies and non-democracies. It exploits data on 56 countries that have experienced institutional change between 1980-2007. Since the institution variable is correlated with unobservables in the determination of institutional change, a maximum likelihood estimation that does not control for this correlation will yield biased estimates. Assuming that the endogeneity operates solely through country fixed effects, I estimate the likelihood of institutional change using fixed effects probit with bias correction. Then I test the hypothesis that the endogeneity is operating through *time-variant* unobservables (in addition to time-invariant elements), and fail to find evidence that time-variant unobservables has a significant effect on institutional change once country fixed effects are controlled for.

This paper finds that having a democratic institution per se does not lead to a decrease in the likelihood of institutional change. The consistently significant factor is the interaction between democracy and the percentage of democracies in the world – the effect is significantly negative, which suggests that the interactions between democracies and non-democracies play a more important role in affecting institutional change than the institution itself. Further classification of political institutions into democracy, autocracy, and intermediate ranges yields stronger results confirming this argument. In fact, the data suggests that autocratic institutions are associated with a lower probability of institutional change than democratic institutions.