Smith

Election Timing

Endogenous election timing allows leaders to schedule elections 'when the time is right'. The author proposes and tests an informational theory of endogenous election timing that explains when leaders call for elections and the consequences of their decisions. In particular, he argues that, if all else is equal, leaders announce elections when they anticipate a decline in their future performance. As a consequence, early elections signal a leader's lack of confidence in future outcomes. The earlier elections occur, relative to expectations, the stronger the signal of demise. Using data on British parliaments since 1945, the author tests hypotheses related to timing of elections, electoral support and subsequent economic performance. Leaders who call elections early (relative to expectations) experience a decline in their popular support relative to pre-announcement levels, experience worse post-electoral performance, and have shorter campaigns.

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49,10 €
49,10 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9780521108317
Medium: Buch
ISBN: 978-0-521-10831-7
Verlag: Cambridge University Press
Erscheinungstermin: 31.12.2008
Sprache(n): Englisch
Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2008
Serie: Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions
Produktform: Kartoniert
Gewicht: 471 g
Seiten: 288
Format (B x H): 152 x 229 mm

Kundenservice Verlag Dr. Otto Schmidt KG
Neumannstraße 10, 40235 Düsseldorf | kundenservice@otto-schmidt.de | 0221-93738-997 (Inland)