Policy Development with Obstruction Contests

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Motivation

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(i) development of policy proposals;

→ bill drafting, expertise, information, etc.

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Question: How does IG proposal power interact w/ (competitive) obstruction?

- Anticipation of opponent obstruction may affect choice of proposal.

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Baseline model: pure spatial conflict.

Extension: spatial conflict + dimension of agreement (policy quality).

→ Generating quality costly to proposer (Hirsch & Shotts 2015, 2023, Hitt et al. 2017)

Key Takeaways

Spatial conflict:

- Proposals less ambitious when faced w/ stronger opposition.
- Weakens association between (relative) proposer strength and policy success.

Spatial conflict w/ policy quality:

- Weak proposers avoids obstruction through quality production.
- Increase in opponent strength may increase or decrease Pr(policy success)

Focus on 'who wins' understates effectiveness of resources (Baumgartner et al 2009)

Related Literature

Competition is an important feature of IG politics (Tullock 1980; Becker 1983; Baumgartner et al 2009)

- An IG's policy success negatively impacts opponent success (Egerod & Junk 2022)
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Policy contests with endogenous proposals (Epstein & Nitzan 2006; Munster 2007; Hirsch & Shotts 2015, 2023)

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     - $\hookrightarrow$ Objection $\rightarrow$ obstruction contest.

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Assumptions:

- Focus on extreme groups compared to status quo $y_0 \in (-1, 1)$.

Equilibrium Concept: SPNE.

Analysis: spatial conflict

Obstruction Contest Outcomes

Given a proposal y_1, define the **stakes** of the contest for $i = 1, -1$ as:

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A feature of this equilibrium is

- the expected net contest payoffs are $v_i - v_j$ for i and 0 for j.

Stronger Opposition Results In Less Ambitious Proposals...

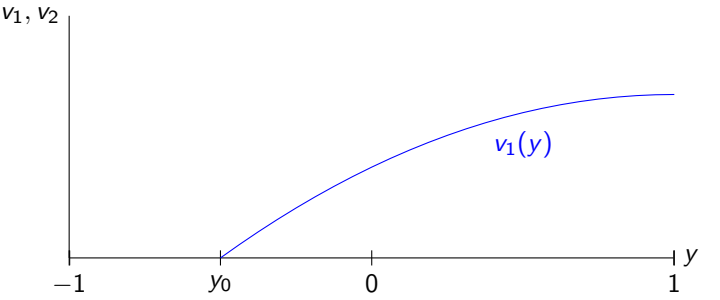

Figure 1: Valuations as a function of proposal $y \in (y_0, 1)$, given $\gamma_1 > \gamma_{-1}$.

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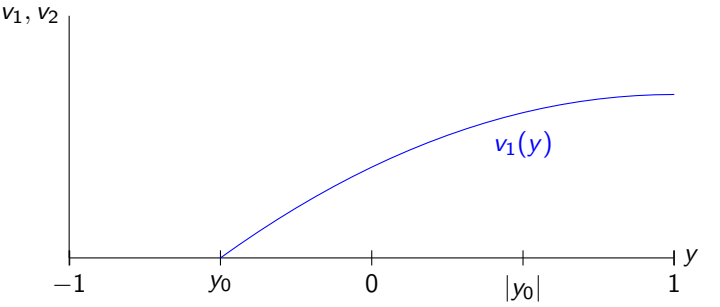

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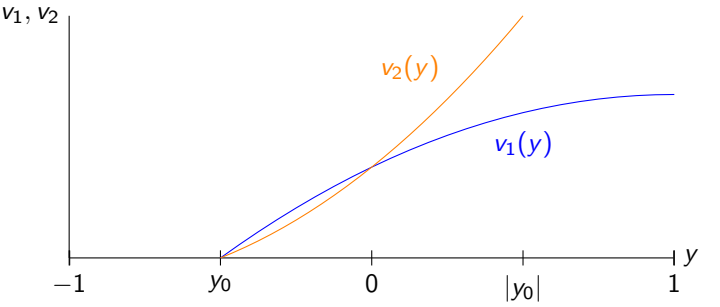

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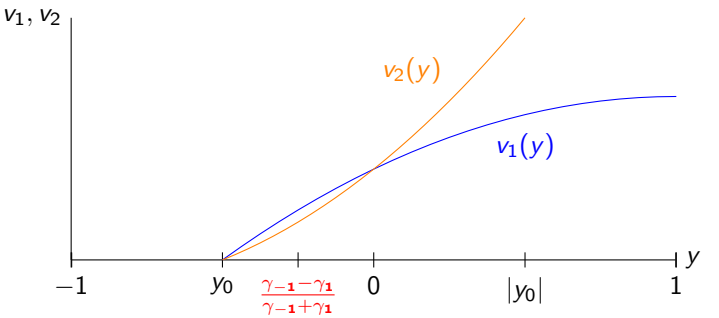

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... and More Persistence Of Status Quo

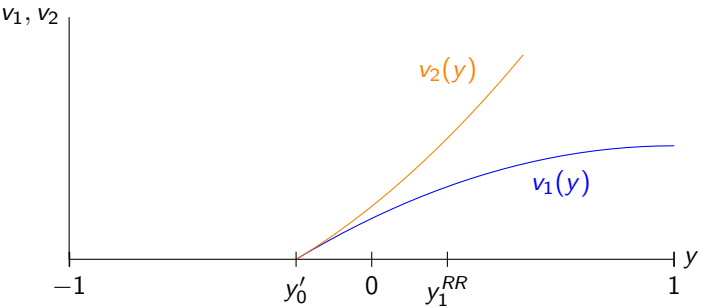

Figure 2: Valuations as a function of proposal $y \in (y_0', 1)$, given $\gamma_1 > \gamma_{-1}$.

Despite limited obstruction power, opponent exerts strong influence on proposals.

Effect of Relative Strength on Policy Success

How does strength in contest stage affect probability of successful policymaking?

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An increase in (relative) proposer strength ($\gamma_1 \downarrow$ or $\gamma_{-1} \uparrow$) has two effects:

- *Direct effect*: weaker opposition $\Rightarrow$ win contest more often
- *Proposal adjustment effect*: weaker opposition $\Rightarrow$ more extreme proposal

Result 1. The direct effect dominates.

$\rightarrow$ Positive association between proposer strength and policy success

$\rightarrow$ However, proposal adjustment effect weakens this association.

Extension: Policy Quality

Model Extension: Policy Quality

Policies may also have common value (Hirsch & Shotts 2015, 2023, Hitt et al. 2017)

- E.g. reduce variance in outcomes, avoid unintended consequences.

Payoffs: Given a policy y with quality q, policy payoffs are $-(y-i)^2+q$.

Quality Cost: A proposal (y_1, q_1) is costly to proposer, with marginal cost α.

Assumptions:

- Status quo quality is low: $q_0 = 0$.
- Fix proposer cost $\gamma_1 = 1$

Obstruction Contest

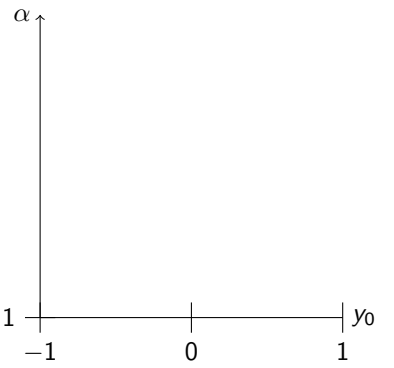
Key difference with baseline: q affects contest valuations in different directions.

- Increases value of winning for proposing group 1.
- Decreases value of winning for opposing group -1.

When quality cost α is below threshold, avoid contest altogether.

Equilibrium Proposal Type

Let $\tilde{y} = \frac{\gamma_{-1}-1}{\gamma_{-1}+1}$.



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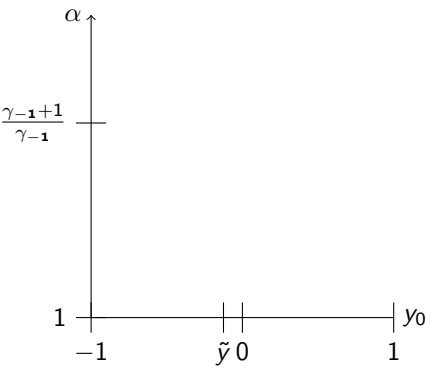

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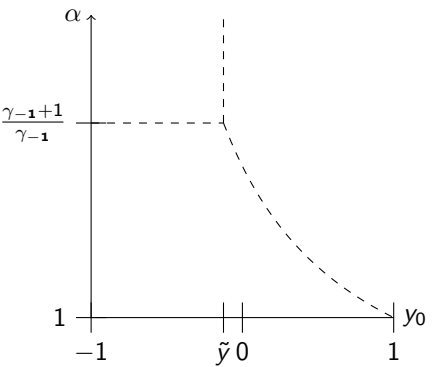

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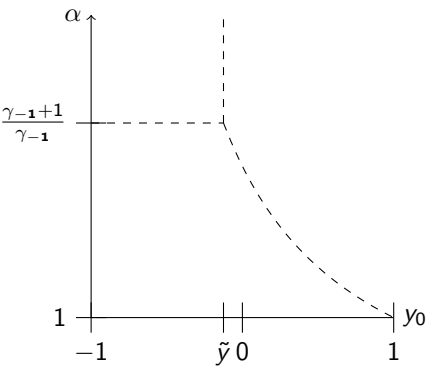

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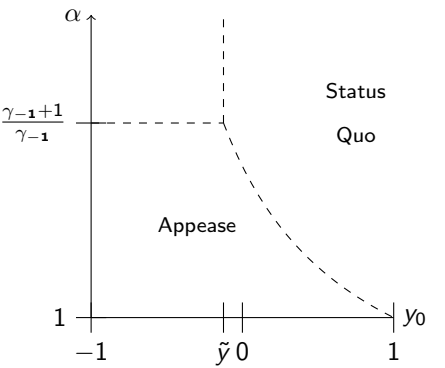

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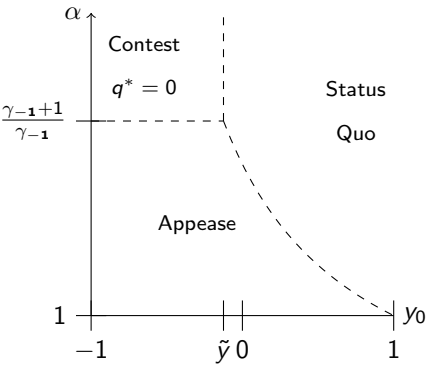

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Result 3. The probability a non-sq proposal is implemented may increase or decrease with opponent effort cost γ_{-1}.

Weaker opposition can have two different effects:

- Conditional on contested proposal $\rightarrow$ proposer wins contest more often.
- Less willing to appease opposition $\rightarrow$ switch to contested proposals.

Discussion

Study linkage between proposals and competition for implementation.

Main implication of combining proposing with competition:

- Focus on 'who wins' may understate effect of resources (Baumgartner et al 2009)
- Preemption through proposals
  - → spatial conflict: stronger groups propose more ambitious proposals
  - → w/ quality: weak proposers may avoid conflict, succeed more often.

Next Steps

Competitive proposing

Amendments/proposal changes

Weaker forms of IG proposal influence

Thank you!

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