Lab Experiments

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Today's Agenda

Lab Experiments

- **Overview**: What lab experiments are and why we should care.
- **Application #1**: Vote buying.
- **Application #2**: Political participation.
- **Application #3:** Lab-in-the-field.
- **Visit the PCRC lab**.

Overview

Lab Experiments

Lab Experiments

A definition

- Experiments are usually classified depending on their **location**:
  - "**In the lab**, the researcher usually seeks **to recreate a situation** that **resembles** a real-life one, and then **randomly assigns a treatment to some subjects in order to observe their reaction**."
- **Internal validity**: since the analyst has **more control over the assignment to treatment**, lab experiments are usually **high on internal validity** (**?**).
- **The price of high internal validity is low external validity** (**?**): experiments in the lab "are even ***more*** artificial." "***Recreating*** a situation" necessarily implies a simplification.

Lab Experiments

A classification

1. **Economics**:
   - **Observed** behavior.
   - **Monetary** incentives.
   - **Abstract** designs.
   - Interaction **between subjects**.

2. **Psychology**:
   - **Self-reported** attitude.
   - **Non-monetary** incentives.
   - **Realistic** designs.
   - Focus on **individual attitudes**.

Lab Experiments

Overview and Discussion

- What's the **assumption** behind having **monetary incentives?**
- What's the **problem** with **self-reported attitudes?**
- What's the **relationship** between a design being **abstract** *and* **recruiting convenience samples?**
- How externally valid can an abstract design be**?**

Application #1

Vote buying

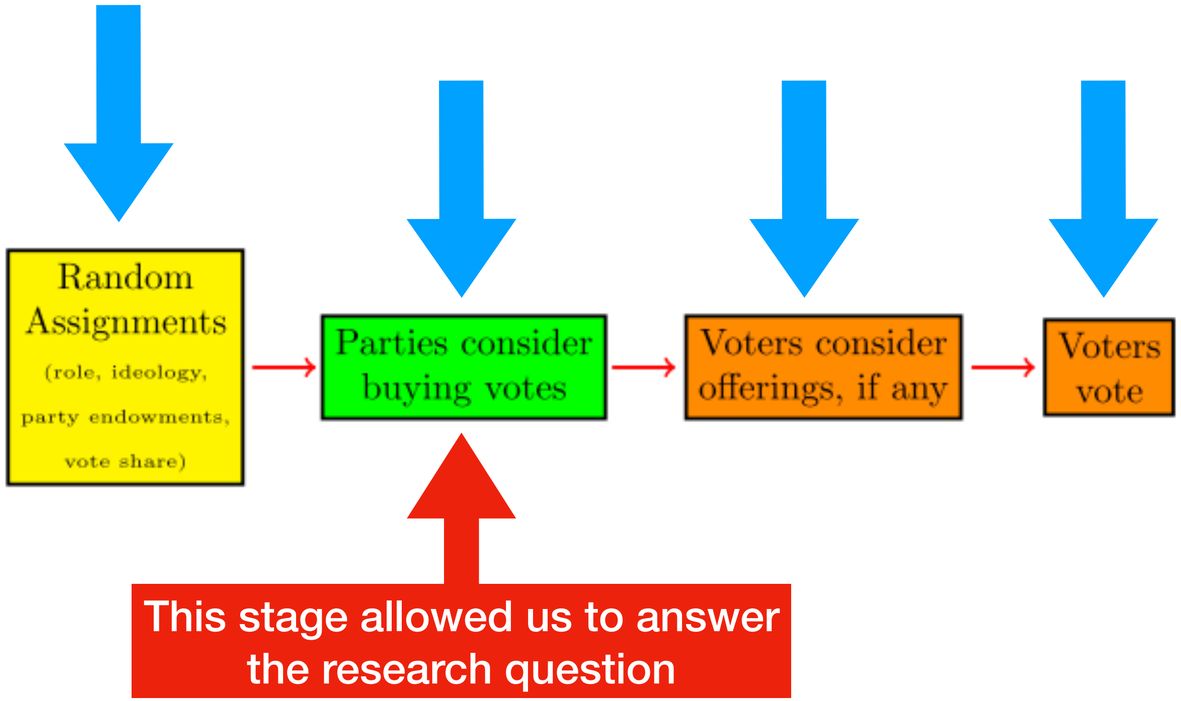
Vote Buying
Theory

- What's **vote buying?**
  - "**Distribution of rewards during elections in contingent exchange for vote choices**" (Examples**?**).
- What's the central question of this paper?
  *When do parties buy votes, when they're **losing** or **wining** an election?*
  Why is this relevant?
- Why would parties **buy more votes** when they're **wining** the election**?**
  1. Because parties ***over-secure*** the electoral support they already have ("**endowment effects**").
  2. Because ***avoiding loses is more important than winning*** ("**loss aversion**").

Vote Buying

Experimental design

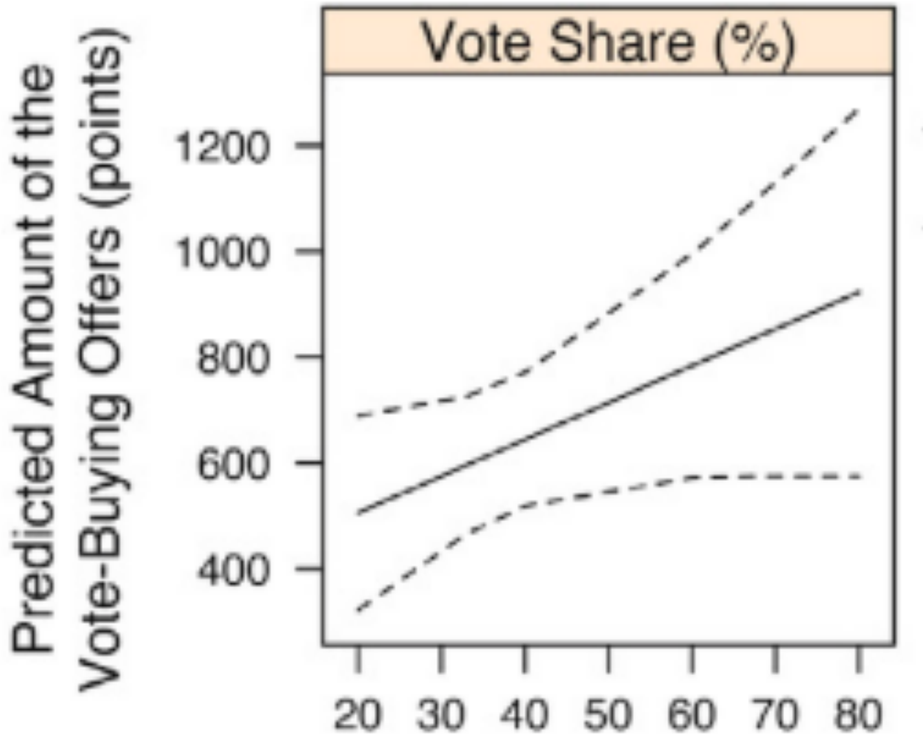
1. **Random assignment (?)**:
   - Roles (party, voter).
   - Ideology (“left”-“right” ?).
   - Endowments (actual money).
   - Vote share (whether they’re winning or losing the election; risk).
2. Players (party role) buy (don’t buy) votes.
   Buying votes costed players money.
3. Players (voters role) consider whether to sell their votes.
   Selling votes made voters wealthier.
4. Players (voters) vote.



Vote Buying

Results

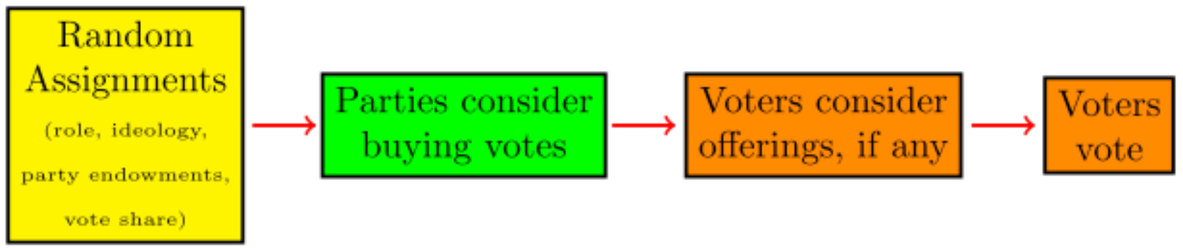
- “Parties" buy more votes when they are winning the election.
  When their vote share is larger.
- **This heavily contrasts with what we knew about vote buying**.
- Did these result surprise you**?**



Vote Buying

Discussion

- Assumptions and possible issues:
  - What does **assigning roles at random** accomplish**?**
  - **External validity**: how externally valid is this experiment**?** Is this *too* synthetic**?** **Ex. Ideology are points**.
  - What's the underlying **assumption** behind monetarily incentivizing behavior**?**



Application #2

Political participation

Political Participation

Theory

- If **voting is costly** (**?**), and if so, why do voters *still* vote**?**
  - When the electorate is massive, the probability of making a difference is small (**?**). Thus, rational voters should *not* vote. Yet, they do. Why?
    "**My vote won't change anything**."
  - In this setup, they find that voters vote when they THINK they are pivotal, i.e., decisive.
    When voters think their votes can make a difference.

Political Participation

Experimental design

- This experiment is an **elicitation experiment**: idea is to **extract knowledge** that may **not be explicitly stated by participants**.
  It observes behavior (econ. experiment); it doesn't rely on respondent's self-reported attitudes.
- What are the **treatment** and **control** conditions**?**
  - **Treatment**: make subjects **to think** (**elicitation**) "*as to whether their voting decision will be pivotal to the election outcome prior to their voting decision*."
  - **Control**: no elicitation.
    Voting without thinking about their relative contribution to the electoral outcomes.
- **In this "voting experiment," participants DO NOT vote but buy tokens**—why**?**
- **Payoffs**: if one group buys more tokens than the other group, each individual of the winning group receives $1 USD (losing group is $0). **It's equivalent to the "satisfaction" that comes with winning the election**.

Political Participation

Issues

- The **pivotal voter model** works when the **electorate is massive**.
  How "massive" was the "electorate" in this particular study?

- The experiment is about **voting**.
  Are they making respondents to actually vote?

- They claim that exploiting a "**context free laboratory setting […] allows [them] to control voting benefits and costs**." **Are we buying this?**

Application #3

Clientelism and Lab-in-the-field experiments

Clientelism and Brokers

Theory

- **Clientelism** is similar to **vote buying**.
  It involves more than just buying votes (e.g., it might grant public jobs).

- Just like vote buying, clientelism involves an **intermediary person** (between the candidate and the voter): **broker** (**they buy clients, and try to secure their vote**).

- To enhance external validity, in this **lab-in-the-field experiment** authors employ **real brokers and actual villagers** instead of having participants simulate roles, thus providing more realistic insights.

- Research questions: *What kind of strategies do clientelist brokers have? How do they secure their clients to vote accordingly?*

Clientelism and Brokers

Experimental design

- They employ a **coordination game**: **player (broker/voter) get rewarded if they coordinate**.
  Operationally, "coordination" means that at least 75% of players need to select the same strategy to get paid.

- Analysts are required to **set the cost and benefit structure before hand to model incentives**.
  In simple: the imagine what's "good"/"bad" and assign payoffs to every strategy.

- Question the experiment intends to study: **What do people prefer, a strategy that is "socially optimal […] or the broker-preferred one"?**
  As in any lab experiment, the situation is abstract: they are never told to "vote."

- **Results**:

  - Brokers with more resources can force their clients more efficiently (don't need to coordinate).

  - Brokers with less resources NEED to coordinate with villagers/voters.

Visit to the PCRC Lab

TSE - 3rd floor - Lecture Room 31

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