

Vote-Selling and Vote-Buying: Does the House Always Win? Gambling Votes in the Lab

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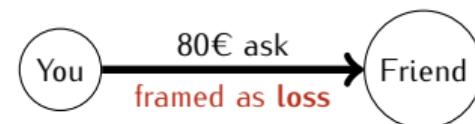
Today we're gonna talk about sequencing

- **Welfare state and unions:** Do we get different welfare states when *unions first mobilize* before benefits expand, versus when *governments move first* potentially avoiding workers' needs?
- **Intergenerational inequality:** What happens to class reproduction when *parents must invest first* (education, housing, debt) and the state steps in later, versus systems where *the state introduces first* universal support?
- Sequencing might really change social outcomes, making losers and winners depending on who plays first.

How Sequencing Changes the Frame

Notice how the sequence flips the frame:

- Friend (unexpectedly) **offers** you 50€: you might see them as (unexpected) **gains**.
- You sell the same good but **demand** 80€: now you fear **losses**.



- ✓ My talk will be about sequencing in clientelism.

Who moves first can reshape the deal

Definition and geographical relevance

Clientelism: distribution of private rewards to individuals during elections in exchange for electoral support (Nichter, 2014).



Definition and geographical relevance

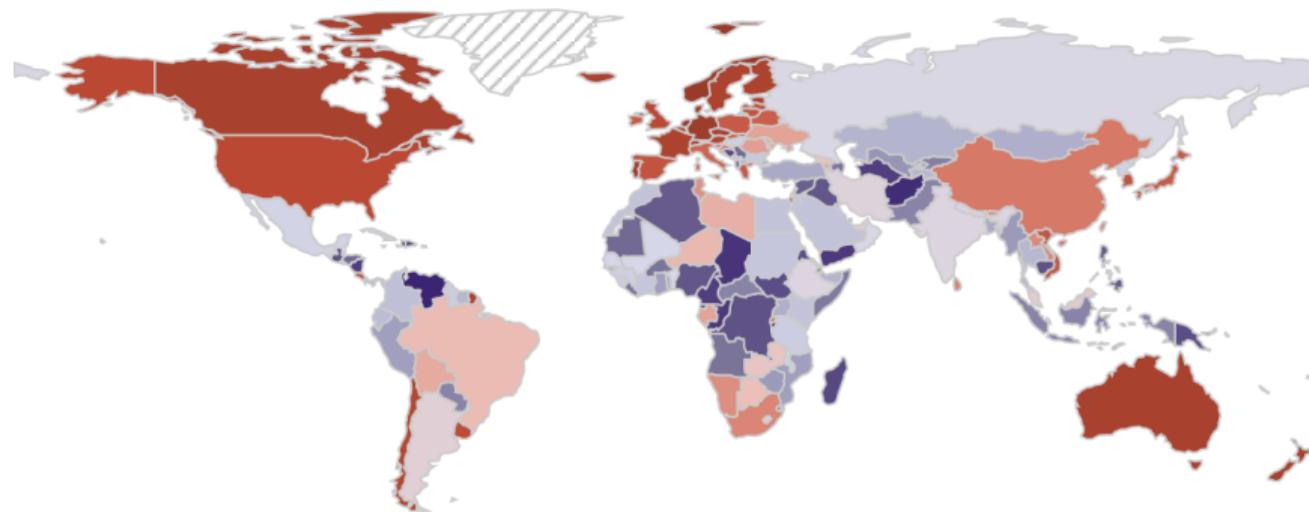
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Essentially, cash for your vote.



Definition and geographical relevance

Clientelism Index (2024)



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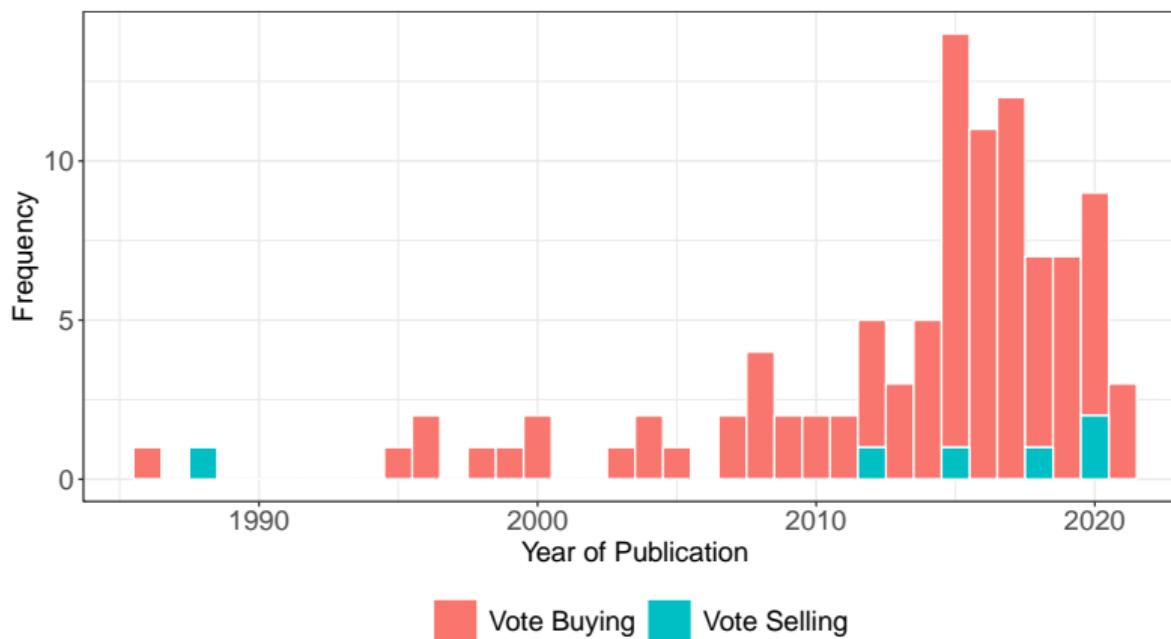
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- **Quantitative:** usually show clientelism as **party-initiated demand** for votes.

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- **Ethnographers:** voters, neighborhood leaders, and brokers (potential **sellers**) often **begin** exchanges.
 - **Quantitative:** usually show clientelism as **party-initiated demand** for votes.
- ✓ **Sequencing has been overlooked in the quantitative literature:**
- Heavily focused on **vote buying**.
 - Very few studies **vote selling**.
- ✓ We argue: to understand clientelism, put **voters as strategic sellers** (just like vote-buying parties).

Sequencing has been Overlooked



Annual frequency of Web of Science publications whose abstracts include the terms "vote buying" and "vote selling."

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- **Experiment:** based on the spatial model, we designed a lab experiment.
- **Findings:**
 - ✓ **When parties move first:** transfers concentrate on **party supporters**.
 - ✓ **When voters move first:** they **demand higher prices** from winning parties that are ideologically far away.
 - ✓ Voters earn **higher payoffs** when parties initiate the exchange.

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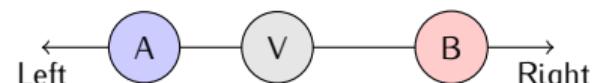
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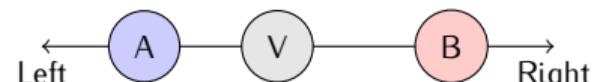
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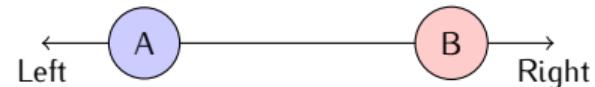


Key idea

Voters face a **tradeoff between ideological utility** $u_j(\gamma_i)$ **and electoral risk** $R_i = \pi W_i$.

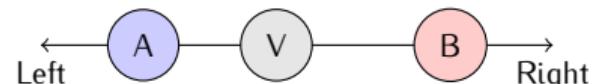
A Uni-dimensional Spatial Theory of Voting

- Ideological advantage Δ



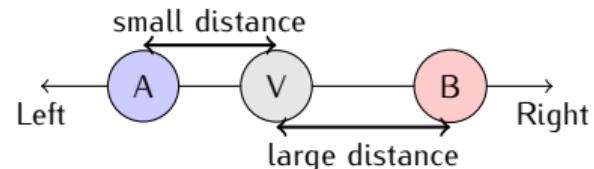
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- Ideological advantage Δ
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Implication

Δ represents the minimum compensation (minimal transfer) the voter needs to switch sides.

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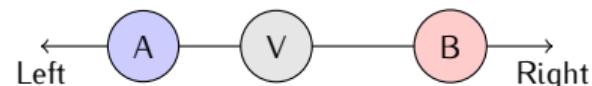
- Sometimes, both parties run in tight races.

High pivotality π



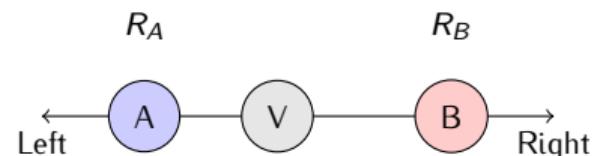
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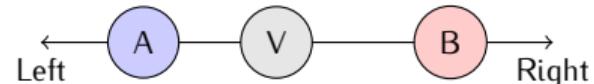


Implication

R_i represents how worthy winning is,
determining the voter's price.

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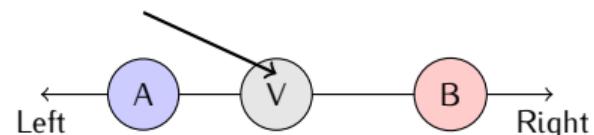
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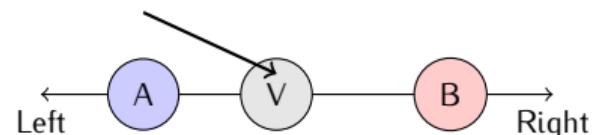
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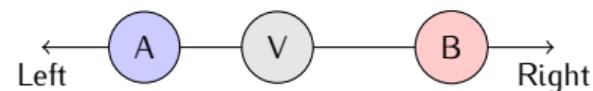
Key result

It is cheapest to buy the vote from the **core voter** (i^* , with advantage Δ).

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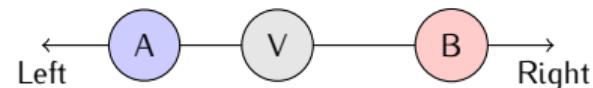
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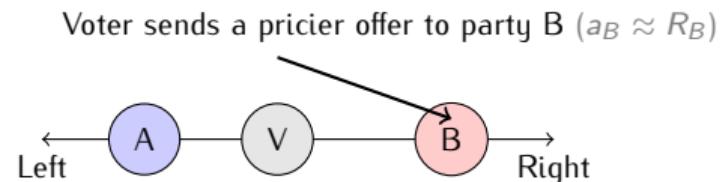
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Implication

Voters ask more from parties with **more to lose** (big R_i).

Formally Derived Hypotheses

- **H1 (Core Targeting Under Party Initiative):**
 - When parties initiate, transfers concentrate on ideologically proximate voters; parties mainly buy from their followers.
- **H2 (Selling to the Opponent Winning Party):**
 - When voters initiate, they demand higher prices from electorally strong but ideologically distant parties.
- **H3 (Higher Voter Payoffs Under Party Initiative):**
 - Because parties overspend under electoral risk, voters earn higher expected payoffs in VB than in VS.

Laboratory implementation

- **Subjects and implementation**

- Following the formal model, we designed a lab experiment in oTree.
- Recruited 102 adult participants.
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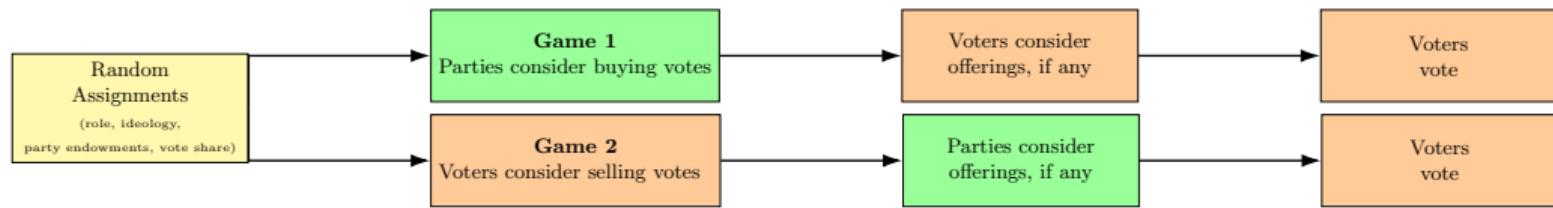
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- **What was randomized every time**

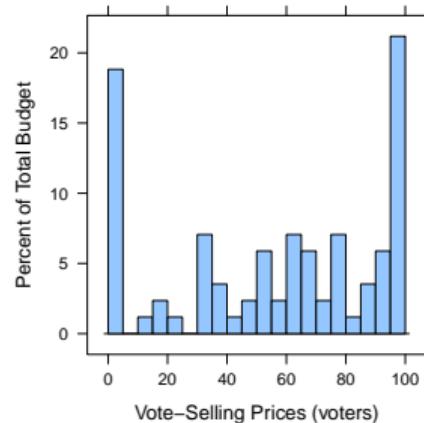
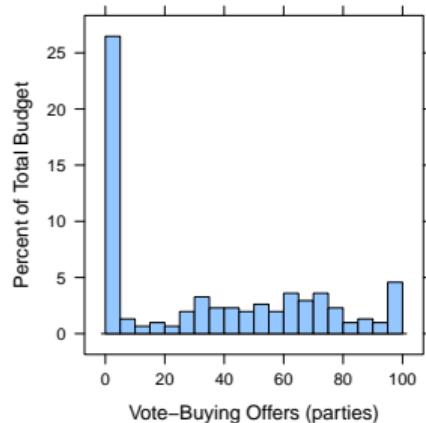
- Role (party, voter).
- Voter's ideological payoffs if A or B wins.
- Party budgets (to buy votes).
- If the voter is pivotal.

Experimental Flow



Two institutional variants in an otherwise identical strategic environment.

The Dependent Variable: Vote-buying and vote-selling prices



- The two histograms describe **very different worlds**:
 - When **parties move first**.
 - When **voters move first**.
- **What explains the differences of these two games?**

Modeling vote-buying offers

- What explains the variance of the vote-buying offers? Estimate OLS:

$$\text{Offer}_{di} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \text{Ideology}_{di} + \gamma_2 \text{VoteShare}_{di} + \gamma_3 \text{Pivotal}_d + u_{di}$$

- Also a logit model for the probability of making *any* offer.
- Standard errors clustered at the party level.

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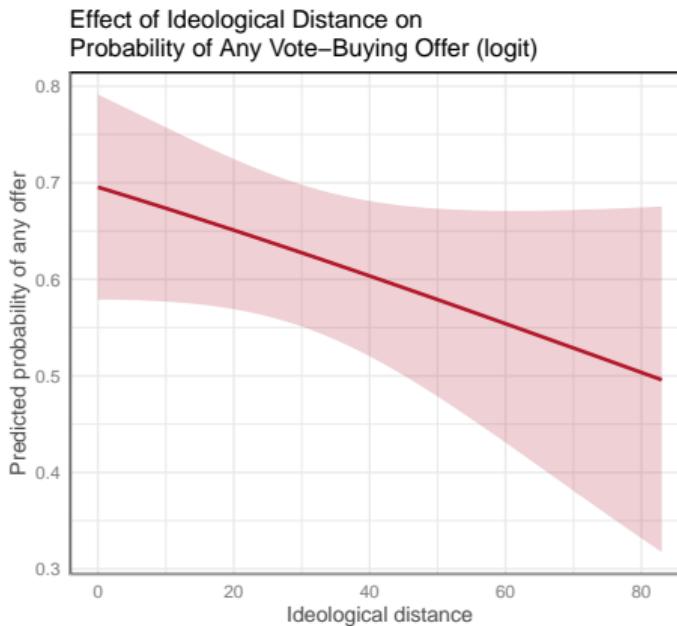
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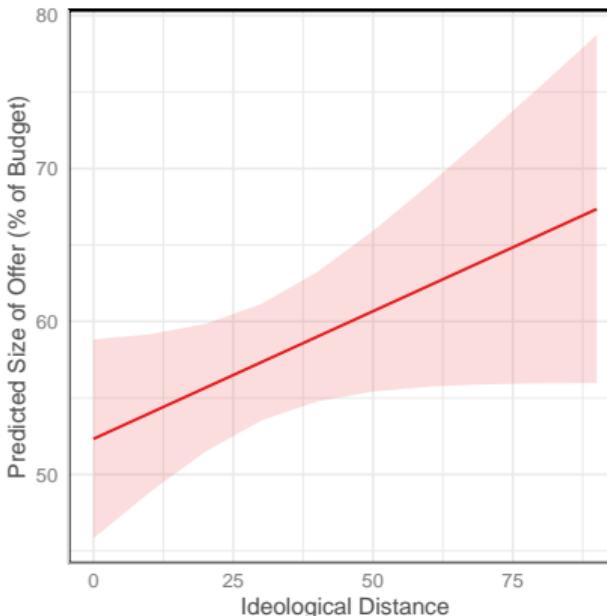
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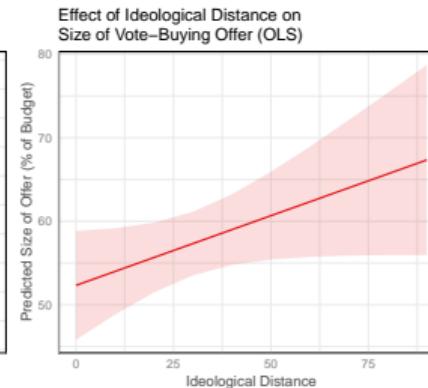
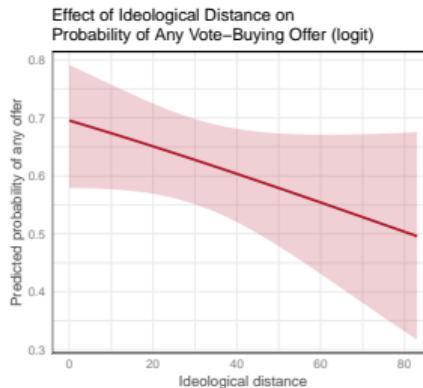
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Effect of Ideological Distance on Size of Vote-Buying Offer (OLS)



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Results: Vote-Buying Offers and Core Targeting



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- So: parties target followers cheaply (right), but pay a premium to buy distant votes (left).

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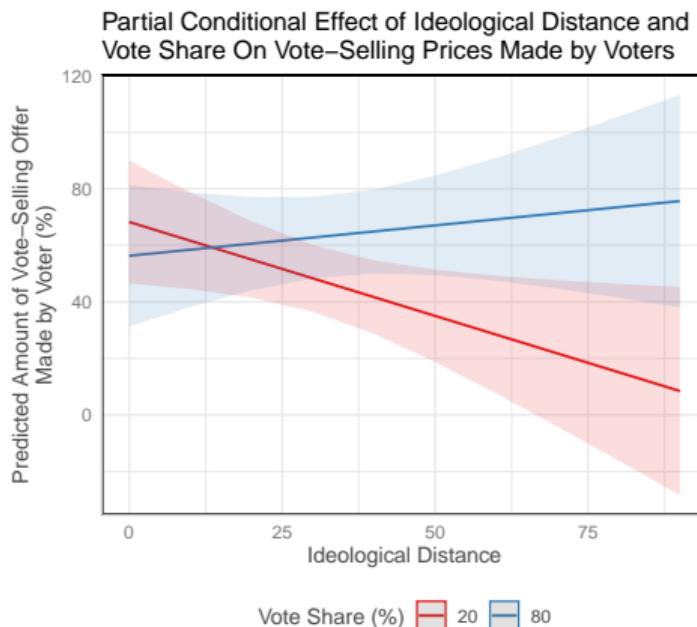
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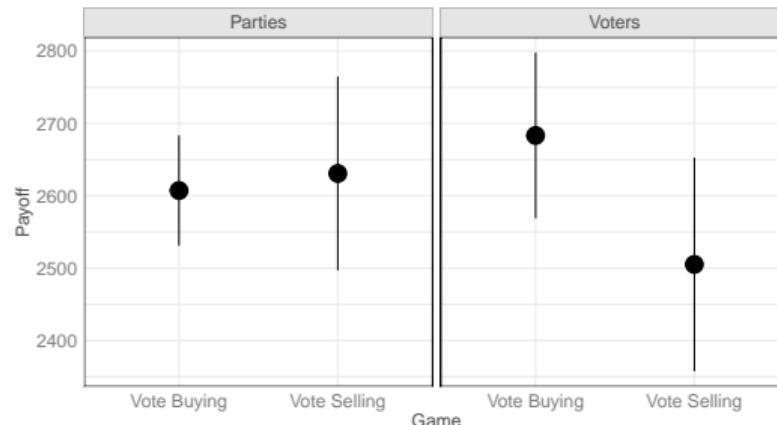
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Requested Prices by Ideology and Electoral Strength



- Voters ask for expensive transfers:
 - When the **weak** party is ideologically close but likely to lose (insurance against losses).
 - When the party is **strong** and distant (voters exploit electorally strong parties' higher electoral stakes $R_i.$)

Payoffs by Role and Institutional Variant



- Party payoffs are similar across vote buying and vote selling.
- Voters earn **higher average payoffs** when parties begin the exchange.

Main takeaways

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- Paper and abstract: www.HectorBahamonde.com
- Feedback very welcome.