

Between Clients and Citizens: Puzzles and Concepts in the Study of Distributive Politics

Markets distribute goods. The drive to earn and to consume moves steel from Anshan to Minnesota, nannies from Brixton to Hampstead, and credit from Wall Street to Athens. Indeed, the movement of steel, nannies, and credit is in a sense what markets – for goods, services, and finance – *are*.

Politics also distributes goods. Government programs channel cash, jobs, credit, and myriad other resources to citizens; elected officials mete out benefits to favored constituencies; and political parties distribute everything from leaflets to liquor in search of votes. And taxes and transfers redistribute income.

The political distribution of goods is more controversial than is their distribution through markets. We expect markets to move valued resources across space and populations. But while few would object to all forms of political distribution, nearly all would object to some forms of it. In any democracy there is broad agreement (though not consensus) that political authority rightly transfers resources across generations by using tax proceeds to fund the education of children or protect of the elderly from penury. Agreement about redistribution through social welfare programs and insurance against social risk is also broad, though far from universal. However, other kinds of political distribution and redistribution – contracts that go to politically connected private firms, for instance, or cash payments in return for votes – are broadly reviled. Indeed, although some forms of political distribution are unquestioningly accepted, others are punishable with prison terms.

Political authorities make choices about distribution. When these authorities' hold on office depends on their winning elections, their choices become bound up with political strategies. And the modes of strategic distribution vary widely. For a sense of this variation, consider some examples.

Progresa/Oportunidades, Mexico. A federal antipoverty program in Mexico, *Progresa* (later called *Oportunidades*), distributes cash to 2.5 million

families. As De la O explains, “The resources of the program and the formula to allocate them are described in detail in the federal budget, which is proposed by the president but approved in the Chamber of Deputies.”¹ Cash goes to mothers in families whose household income is in the bottom two deciles of the national distribution and who keep their children in school and take them for medical checkups. An agency of the federal government administers *Progresa/Oportunidades*. Beneficiaries have bank accounts, linked to ATM-style cards, into which the funds are deposited. Compliance with legal criteria of distribution is audited through random-sample surveys and is high: the criteria for inclusion closely match the profile of beneficiaries.²

Emergency Food Aid, Argentina. A municipal social worker in a provincial town in Argentina receives, one by one, townspeople lined up outside her office door. They are seeking to be placed on a list of beneficiaries for an emergency food program. The social worker’s desk is replete with photographs of Juan Domingo Perón and Evita Perón, founders of the mayor’s party. The mayor’s office repeatedly intervenes to check the list, modifying it in ways that will generate votes. Weitz-Shapiro, who interviewed the social worker and studied the program, found partisan intervention to modify recipient lists of beneficiaries in 85 of the 127 municipalities she studied.³

La Efectiva, Mexico. As part of his 2011 campaign for the governorship of the State of Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate, Eruviel Ávila, signed voters up at campaign events for another ATM-style card, this one called “*La Efectiva*,” The Effective One. If he won, Ávila promised, card holders would receive payments that could be used toward two out of a long list of promised statewide programs, including health care and food support for women; educational, sports, and cultural scholarships; old-age pensions; home improvement projects; and agricultural subsidies. The campaign distributed more than 2 million cards. The effort elicited personal appeals from residents, some posted on Ávila’s website. “Denise,” for instance, wrote, “Good afternoon, Eruviel! I’m a high school student and I wish to ask your help to get a scholarship. I have an excellent grade point average . . .”⁴

Housing Improvement Program, Singapore. The government of Singapore invested heavily in improvements and maintenance of housing and openly used the program as a tool to reward constituencies who voted for the ruling party (People’s Action Party [PAP]) and punish those who voted for the opposition. As Tam reported, in 1985 the National Development Minister, Teh Cheang Wan, explained in a news conference that “we must look after PAP

¹ De la O 2012, p. 39.

² See especially De la O 2012. See also Fiszbein and Schady 2009.

³ Weitz-Shapiro 2011.

⁴ See *La Jornada*, 26 September 2011. The campaign’s URL is <http://eruviel.com/mi-blog/piensa-en-grande-con-la-efectiva>.

constituencies first because the majority of the people supported us.” When an opposition Member of Parliament inquired about the treatment of residents who voted for the PAP but who lived in opposition constituencies, “Teh replied ‘It is regrettable, but it can’t be helped.’”⁵

The examples display stark differences. In *Progresa/Oportunidades*, the criteria of distribution are public and the public criteria are binding. In the Argentine emergency food program, by contrast, local authorities and operatives subverted formal rules of distribution with hidden ones that promoted their electoral objectives. Both *La Efectiva* and the Singapore housing improvement program openly linked access to public benefits to electoral support. In the Mexican setting, this linkage made the strategy scandalous and subject to litigation.⁶ In Singapore, an authoritarian state, the linkage was not passively accepted – hence the challenging questions from journalists and opposition politicians – but it seemed unsurprising. Another striking difference is that *Progresa* goes out of its way to depersonalize distribution, replacing campaign workers and party operatives with bureaucrats; *La Efectiva* and the Argentine program involved face-to-face contact and direct party involvement.

Other instances like the second two are easy to find, and not just in Latin America or in the developing world. Although *Progresa*-like distributive strategies are more common in wealthier than in poorer countries, in later pages we cite well-researched distributive programs in wealthy democracies – places such as Sweden, Australia, and the United States – that look more like *La Efectiva* than *Progresa*.

Contemporary advanced democracies were once riddled with electoral exchanges in line with the Argentine and second Mexican examples. A seasoned American political boss, looking back on his career heading New York’s Tammany machine, mused:

If there’s a fire on Ninth, Tenth, or Eleventh Avenue, for example, any hour of the day or night, I’m usually there with some of my election district captains as soon as the fire-engines. If a family is burned out . . . I just get quarters for them, buy clothes for them if their clothes were burned up, and fix them up till they get things runnin’ again. It’s philanthropy, but it’s politics, too – mighty good politics. Who can tell how many votes one of these fires bring [sic] me? The poor are the most grateful people in the world.⁷

⁵ Tam 2008, p. 17.

⁶ The tactic, with its apparent linkage of public benefits to electoral support, was controversial and drew formalized complaints from competing parties. Mexico’s Federal Electoral Tribunal ultimately decided against these claims on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence that any particular person’s vote was bought. See, e.g., SUP-JIN-359/2012, Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación.

⁷ Riordan 1994 [1905], *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, p. 6.

British elections in the nineteenth century, in turn, featured agents whose job it was to purchase votes. One explained:

Retaining fees of two guineas or more were sometimes paid as a preliminary earnest of the candidate's good will. "I asked for their votes," said one canvasser, "but you might as well ask for their lives, unless you had money to give them."⁸

This book is about distributive practices that politicians use to try to win and retain office. We examine especially closely the strategies of clientelism, machine politics, and patronage, all of them nonprogrammatic distributive strategies – a term we define in the next section. Understanding how the strategies of distributive politics differ from one another, how they work, and why they change helps shed light on basic questions that have preoccupied scholars for decades. Consider a society that undergoes a transition such that voters who used to trade their votes for cash, poverty relief, or help in obtaining a job now offer their votes to parties that promise, and deliver, public policies of which they approve. Most – ourselves included – would consider this a shift from a less to a more democratic polity. Our study sheds light, then, on processes of democratization and democratic consolidation. What's more, parties responsive to people who trade their votes distribute favors and largess to individuals, whereas parties attentive to voters who value programmatic appeals have incentives to construct welfare-oriented public programs. The story of the demise of clientelism and machine politics is, in this sense, the prehistory of the welfare state.

1.1 CONCEPTUALIZING MODES OF DISTRIBUTION

Many conceptual distinctions can be drawn among distributive strategies. We might distinguish programs generating public goods from ones targeting individuals.⁹ Public goods may benefit all contributors, or they may subsidize public expenditures of narrower geographic constituencies.¹⁰ Benefits may be irreversible (bridges) or reversible (public employment).¹¹ Parties make long-term and slow-moving investments in basic programs but campaign, on the margin, offering "tactical distributions."¹² Incumbents alone may control benefits exclusively (political monopoly) or they may be controlled by opponents who are economic monopolists.¹³

These are all real differences and have been shown to entail distinct political dynamics. Our scheme is distinctive in that we develop it with one eye on the empirical world and another on normative democratic concerns. We

⁸ Seymour 1970 [1915], p. 394.

⁹ See, e.g., Lizzeri and Persico 2004.

¹⁰ This is the definition of *pork-barrel politics* offered by Aldrich 1995.

¹¹ Robinson and Torvik 2005.

¹² Dixit and Londregan 1996.

¹³ Medina and Stokes 2007.

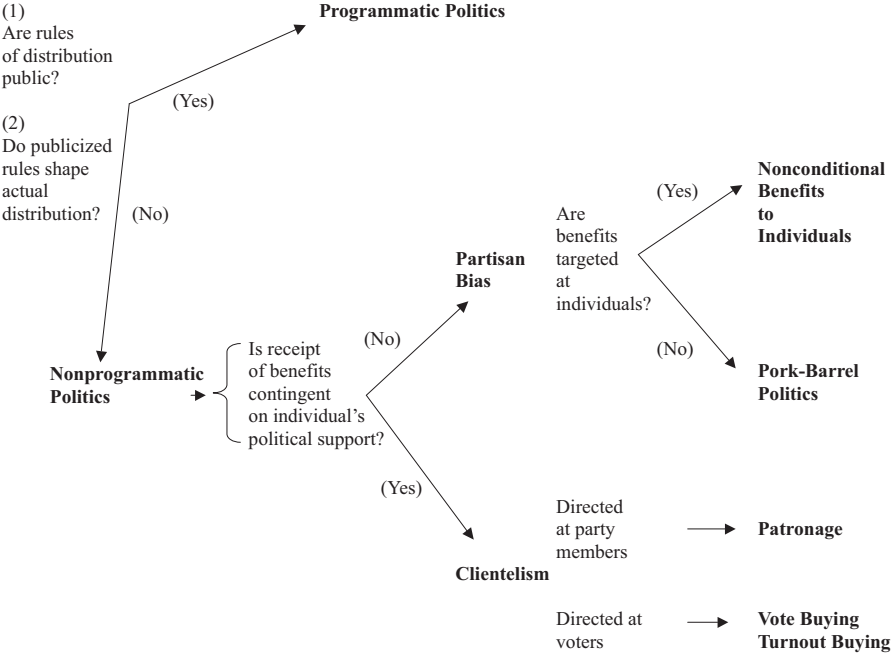


FIGURE 1.1. A Conceptual Scheme of Distributive Politics.

focus on two distinctions. One is between what we call *programmatic* versus *nonprogrammatic* distribution. The other is between unconditional benefits and conditional exchanges. We turn to the programmatic/nonprogrammatic distinction first; it is depicted as the top left branch in Figure 1.1.

1.1.1 Programmatic Distribution

For a distributive strategy to be programmatic, in our usage, two things must be true. First, the criteria of distribution must be public. Often, though not always, a public discussion precedes the crafting of distributive policies and their implementation. Even when *ex ante* public debates are absent – when distributive policies, for instance, are the product of internal governmental discussions or bureaucratic processes – the criteria of distribution are available for public discussion.

Second, the public, formal criteria of distribution must actually shape the distribution of the resources in question. Hence, for a scheme to be programmatic, the criteria that guide distribution must:

1. Be formalized and public, and
2. Shape actual distribution of benefits or resources.

Scholars who study distinct modes of distributive politics often have in mind that some forms are legitimate, whereas others are not. These scholars may not develop explicitly why it is that pork-barrel politics or partisan distributions of social benefits is wrong, but these practices seem to at least fail a “smell test.” In our conceptual reflection, we examined the distinctions that scholars made, but could think of legitimate-seeming versions of the strategies to which these scholars had attached illegitimate-sounding labels. *Pork-barrel politics* is an example. If it simply means using tax receipts from a broader constituency to finance local public goods in a smaller constituency, then the concept of pork would have to include the expenditure of national public resources to build schools or bridges in particular regions or localities. If some such spending is illegitimate, then this must be for reasons other than that an intergovernmental transfer is involved. The concept of an “earmark,” a term of derision to describe certain kinds of legislation in the United States, presents the same dilemma. Not all bridges are “bridges to nowhere” – there must be something about the process determining how resources are spent that makes some legitimate and others illegitimate.¹⁴ Not just the scholarly literature but also public discussions of earmarks in the United States often struggle to make sense of the difference.

After reviewing many studies about distributive politics, the common element in those that seemed particularly unlikely to pass the smell test was the absence of public criteria of distribution or the failure of official criteria to bite when it came to deciding who would benefit. Our publicity criterion, though inductively arrived at, nevertheless dovetails with normative theories of just distribution that invoke the importance of publicity as a first principle, a point we take up in greater depth in the final chapter. It also fits nicely with definitions of legal and illegal spending, or promises of spending, by office holders and office seekers.

After all, the conceptual distinction between programmatic and nonprogrammatic distribution is not merely academic. All democracies have laws against vote trafficking. In places where these laws are enforced, judges have to draw lines between the legal deployment of resources by ambitious office seekers and the illegal purchase of votes. When they do, publicity comes into play.

As an example, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1982 found that promises of material benefits made openly in campaigns and aimed at broad categories of citizens did not constitute vote trafficking and hence were legal. The Court wrote:

We have never insisted that the franchise be exercised without taint of individual benefit; indeed, our tradition of political pluralism is partly predicated on the expectation that voters will pursue their individual good through the political process, and that the summation of these individual pursuits will further the collective welfare. *So long as the*

¹⁴ The debate over federal spending for bridges in Alaska became a salient issue during the 2008 presidential campaign in the United States.

*hoped-for personal benefit is to be achieved through the normal processes of government, and not through some private arrangement, it has always been, and remains, a reputable basis upon which to cast one's ballot.*¹⁵

This had not been a private, secret offer, the Court reasoned; rather it was “made openly, subject to the comment and criticism of his political opponent and to the scrutiny of the voters.”¹⁶

Yet perhaps the idea that much distributive politics is filtered through public deliberations and constrained by formal rules is quixotic. Was the Court correct, with regard to the United States or any other democracy, that programmatic politics – open, public offers of material benefits, subject to debate – constitutes the “*normal* process of government”? Indeed, there is substantial evidence that the Court’s theory – and what we are calling programmatic politics – is an accurate depiction of distributive politics in many democracies. Mexico’s *Progres*a program is an example and one that suggests that open and binding rules can constrain distribution in developing democracies as well as wealthy ones.

Notice, however, a selection bias in the literature. Evidence of bias in the distribution of public resources is noteworthy, whereas reports of programmatic distribution have a dog-bites-man quality. Therefore the academic literature offers much more evidence of the former than the latter. Still, scholarly accounts of partisan bias in the allocation of public programs often contrast this bias with what is considered normal and proper in the national setting under consideration.

In Western Europe, patterns of public spending typically shift when the partisan identity of governments changes. Even when governments are constrained by international markets and institutions, such as the European Union, scholars identify predictable partisan differences in spending priorities.¹⁷ In the United States as well, where the ideological distance between the major parties was for decades less pronounced than between left and right parties in Western Europe, spending priorities reflect the ideological differences between the parties and the contrasting interests of their constituencies.¹⁸ Contrasting priorities are forecast in campaign statements and party platforms and echoed in legislative debates. And campaign spending by political parties is severed from public spending and focused on persuasive communications rather than gifts or treats. Bickers and Stein show that changes in party control of the U.S. Congress induced changes in broad categories of spending – categories, what’s more, that corresponded to broad ideological differences between the parties.¹⁹ Their study supports the

¹⁵ Brown v. Hartlage p. 456 of U.S. 57, emphasis added.

¹⁶ Brown v. Hartlage p. 456 of U.S. 57.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Boix 1998, Garrett 2001, or Hibbs 1987.

¹⁸ However, the Campaign Manifestos Project finds substantial ideological and programmatic differences between the platforms of the Democratic and Republican Parties in the United States; see Klingerman et al. 1994.

¹⁹ Bickers and Stein 2000.

court's claim that the "normal process of government" in the United States is public, predictable – in short, programmatic.

Along similar lines, Levitt and Snyder wrote about the pre-1994 U.S. Congress that the

Democratic majority seems unable to target extraordinary amounts of money to specific districts, or to quickly alter the geographic distribution of expenditures. It appears that parties in the U.S. can, given enough time, target *types* of voters, but they cannot easily target individual districts.²⁰

In other countries as well, distributive politics is often, perhaps even "normally," programmatic.

1.1.2 Nonprogrammatic Distribution

Nonprogrammatic distributive strategies – beginning at the lower branch of Figure 1.1 – are ones that violate either of the two criteria outlined earlier. Either there are no public criteria of distribution or the public criteria are subverted by private, usually partisan ones.

We began with glimpses of nonprogrammatic distribution in Mexico (the "La Efectiva" campaign) and Argentina. But in advanced democracies as well, distributive schemes sometimes lack public criteria of distribution. To give some examples, in Australia, in the weeks leading up to the 1990 and 1993 elections, the ruling Labour Party allocated constituency grants to build sports stadiums. The parliamentary opposition denounced partisan bias in the program, and eventually there was an investigation by the Auditor-General. The bias was later confirmed by Denmark, whose study suggests that this instance contrasted with normative expectations and normal distributive politics in Australia.²¹ The Department of Environment, Sport, and Territories claimed that "community need" was a leading criterion of distribution. However, "no departmental measures or estimations of community need were publicly released."²²

Sweden is a country that mainly practices programmatic politics. Papakostas notes the absence of a Swedish-language equivalent to the term *clientelism*; when Swedish journalists refer to clientelism "in other countries, they usually have to add that this is a practice where politicians exchange favors for political support."²³ Teorrell investigated Swedish electoral practices in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries and found not a single incident of vote buying.²⁴ Still, distributive strategies in Sweden have occasionally strayed from the programmatic. In the run-up to a national election in 1998, swing municipalities – ones with large numbers of voters who were indifferent between the

²⁰ Levitt and Snyder 1995 p. 961. Emphasis in the original.

²¹ Denmark 2000.

²² Denmark 2000, p. 901.

²³ Papakostas 2001, p. 33.

²⁴ Teorrell 2011.

parties – received more, and more generous, environmental grants than did municipalities populated by more partisan voters.²⁵ The authors noted that “the preparation” of proposals “as well as the final [funding] decisions” were “made by the incumbent government and there [was] no explicit formula describing how the grants should be distributed.”²⁶ They described this experience as unusual; the grants were not related to the “efficiency and equity goals otherwise typically attached to intergovernmental grants.”²⁷

Notwithstanding the evidence of much programmatic politics in the United States cited earlier, that country as well offers many instances of nonprogrammatic distribution. U.S. presidents can help channel public spending toward the districts of electorally vulnerable members of Congress.²⁸ The American Congress’s use of “earmarks” is another example of hidden criteria of distribution.²⁹

The second criterion for programmatic distribution is also not infrequently violated, whether in advanced or developing democracies. Here political actors craft formal, public rules for distribution. But in practice these rules are set aside in favor of more electorally convenient criteria. In such cases, there is no effort to work special treatment into the language of legislation. Instead political actors in control of distribution ignore what legislation or bureaucratic practice call for and channel benefits to groups, regions, or even individuals who would not receive them, or who would be given a lower priority, if official criteria were followed. To offer one example, formalized criteria governed spending on transportation infrastructure in Spain in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet in practice, funds were allocated in such a way as to benefit favored regions with electorally vulnerable incumbents.³⁰

Our programmatic/nonprogrammatic distinction, as we noted earlier, cross-cuts distinctions drawn by other scholars. A common distinction is based on

²⁵ Dahlberg and Johansson 2002.

²⁶ Dahlberg and Johansson 2002, p. 27.

²⁷ Dahlberg and Johansson 2002, p. 27.

²⁸ Berry et al. 2010.

²⁹ Earmarks are highly particular rules that members of Congress enter into legislation in a quiet, secretive manner. Technically they are public – they are a formalized part of the legislation – but legislators hope that they will remain opaque to the broader public. When they are made public, they are seen as ludicrous and, sometimes, scandalous. Consider the case of a majority leader of the U.S. Senate who wanted to channel benefits to specific hospitals in his state without appearing to do so. In 2009 he inserted an amendment into health care reform legislation that would extend grants to “certain hospitals” that been designated as cancer centers “on July 27, 1978, February 17, 1998, June 13, 2000” (*New York Times*, “Health Bill Could Hold Reward for 4 Cancer Centers,” September 22, 2009, p. 20). Dixit and Londregan (1998, p. 163) cited similar examples from the U.S. Tax Reform Act of 1986, such as special “transitional rules” for “a convention center with respect to which a convention tax was upheld by a state supreme court on February 8, 1985” (the Miami Convention Center), and one for “a binding contract entered into on October 20, 1984, for the purchase of six semisubmersible drilling units (a drilling project for Alabamas Sonat Company).”

³⁰ Castells and Solé-Ollé 2005.

the kinds of goods given out: public, club, targeted, and the like. Not infrequently, the key distinction that others have made is between collective benefits or public goods versus individual or targeted benefits. Hence Lizzeri and Persico equate “clientelism and patronage (pork-barrel politics)” with “redistribution (ad hominem benefits)”;³¹ this they contrast with “a public good with diffuse benefits.”³² Shefter distinguished between “divisible benefits – patronage of various sorts” and “collective benefits or appeals to collective interests.”³² It is certainly helpful in many contexts to distinguish between collective and individual benefits. However, programmatic and nonprogrammatic distribution, as we define them, cross-cut this distinction. Distributive programs aimed at individuals may follow public criteria that determine actual distribution. If so, targeting individuals still constitutes programmatic politics, in our usage. By the same token, local public goods may be channeled to responsive localities according to rules that are hidden from public view, or public rules may be ignored in how such resources are divided. In this case, public goods are non-programmatic. Many would call this pork-barrel politics, as we do later. The term *pork* connotes a departure from fairness and good government that is not easily reconciled with Lizzeri and Persico’s view of public-goods distributions as antithetical to clientelism.

Modes of Nonprogrammatic Distribution

Nonconditional partisan bias. The second branch of Figure 1.1 identifies a basic distinction among forms of nonprogrammatic politics. In some settings, politically discriminatory distributions generate good will among recipients who may, as a consequence, be more likely to support the benefactor candidate or party. However, recipients who defect and vote for a different party suffer no individual punishment. Consider a person from a pivotal constituency who gains access to an antipoverty program, in effect jumping the queue ahead of more needy people in other districts. We define this as a situation of *non-conditional individual benefits*. If the program targets collectivities, such as geographic constituencies, we call this *pork-barrel politics*. Nonconditional individual benefits and pork can add votes for the benefactor to the extent that the largess boosts voter good will toward the candidate and party.³³

From the perspective of normative democratic theory, the main difficulty raised by nonconditional individual benefits and pork is the departure from publicity. We return to this point in the final chapter.

³¹ Lizzeri and Persico 2004, p. 708, 713.

³² Shefter 1977, p. 88.

³³ Different polities and legal systems draw the lines between vote buying, nonconditional (non-programmatic) benefits to individuals, and harmless campaign practices in different places; these definitions also change in individual settings over time. A campaign or election-day event in which any person who cares to show up can receive food, drink, and entertainment are considered innocuous practices in some settings but treating in others.

Clientelism. In other settings, the party offers material benefits only on the condition that the recipient returns the favor with a vote or other forms of political support.³⁴ The voter suffers a punishment (or reasonably fears that he or she will suffer one) should he or she defect from the implicit bargain of a benefit for a vote; not (just) good will, but fear of punishment, turns distributive largess into votes. We call nonprogrammatic distribution combined with conditionality *clientelism*.

The importance of conditionality and *quid-pro-quo* understandings to our conceptual scheme again conforms to legal theory. In the U.S. Supreme Court decision cited earlier, it was important to the Court that the candidate's offer "was to extend beyond those voters who cast their ballots for [him], to all taxpayers and citizens." His offer "scarcely contemplated a particularized acceptance or a *quid-pro-quo* arrangement."³⁵

Quid pro quo exchanges of cash, alcohol, or building materials (to name just a few items) in return for a vote raise normative red flags. These exchanges seem to violate the free action or autonomy of voters. Even if we accept that voters are never fully autonomous and always come under the influence of some other actor – parents, co-workers, "opinion makers," or party leaders – still the image of the voter being held to account for his or her choice is disquieting. Perhaps this is because an implicit threat to cut the voter off from future benefits as a direct consequence of his or her voting choices moves uncomfortably close to coercion. Political philosophers, and undoubtedly most lay citizens, would deem coercion of the vote antithetical to democracy.³⁶ Or perhaps vote trafficking has nefarious social side effects or negative externalities, whatever its effects on vote sellers. Consider that, in a narrow material sense, nothing is at stake in an individual's vote: it is unlikely to change the outcome of the election, and if benefits come by way of programmatic distribution, a vote will not influence the probability that the person who yields it will receive benefits. Therefore, offers of benefits in direct exchange for votes hold the power to trump other considerations in voters' choices. In such a setting, individual benefits with conditionality – clientelism – would be especially toxic. They can blunt elections as instruments for holding governments to account and for communicating the distribution of voters' preferences.³⁷ We return to these questions in the final chapter.

Patronage Versus Vote and Turnout Buying. Figure 1.1 further develops distinctions among types of clientelism. Political machines orient some of their

³⁴ Our distinction at the first branch of Figure 1.1, between public and binding rules and non-public or nonbinding ones, is novel. The distinction between conditional and unconditional exchanges – the second branch – is more common in the literature; see especially Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, p. 10.

³⁵ *Brown v. Hartlage* p. 465 of U.S. 58.

³⁶ See, e.g., Mansbridge 2010.

³⁷ See Karlan 1994 on the socially desirable features of elections and how they can be undone by vote trafficking.

non-programmatic largess toward their own party members. Typically, the benefit they offer is public employment, though other resources may also flow to party operatives. The term *patronage* is colloquially used to refer to intra-party flows of benefits, and we adopt that usage here. At the bottom right side of Figure 1.1, the *voter* (not the party operative) is the object of party largess. Political machines may treat or bribe to persuade people to vote for them; we call this *vote buying*. Or they treat or bribe to get voters to the polls; following Nichter, we call this *turnout buying*.³⁸ In later chapters, we discuss contingent payments designed to elicit other kinds of political support, such as attendance at rallies.

Constituency Service. Machines don't just offer voters largess in the run-up to elections. They also help constituents to solve problems, interceding on their behalf to obtain resources from higher levels of the state, contacting officials to deal with emergencies, and the like. They are "personal problem-solving networks."³⁹ Machine operatives usually insist that they offer such assistance without regard for the electoral sympathies or identities of the supplicant; the only criterion for spending time and effort on behalf of constituents is their need. When this is true, their actions call to mind what in the United States is called *constituency service*. Fenno has shown that U.S. members of Congress generally do render constituency service indiscriminately to all comers. The criteria of distribution are district residence and need.⁴⁰ We show that clientelist machine operatives do not merely perform constituency service in this sense; instead, they typically use other criteria, such as a voter's electoral responsiveness and willingness to join local organizations, when deciding how to deploy their scarce resources.

We do not locate constituency service in Figure 1.1. It is like programmatic distribution in that it offers assistance to voters independent of their responsiveness, but it is not "programmatic" in the sense of constituting a particular initiative signaled by campaign pronouncements or by party ideology. Yet it is clearly an electoral strategy. By generating good will among constituents who receive assistance, and by allowing the politician to build a reputation for fairness and competence, constituency service is probably an effective tactic. Constituency service as it is practiced today in the United States contains echoes of machine politics of old. But many of the functions of the machine have been taken over by governmental bureaucracies, and rarely would an individual constituent be denied access to a social program because he or she has proved to be electorally unresponsive – as is the case of clientelism.

We illustrate in Table 1.1 the potential for our conceptual scheme to translate into codings of the practices studied by particular scholars. It presents

³⁸ Nichter 2008. Parties may also treat or bribe to keep voters away from the polls, as discussed by Cox and Kousser 1981. We don't find this strategy, which we call *abstention buying*, to be a particularly prevalent strategy and therefore don't discuss it extensively. However, we return to the normative implications of abstention buying in the final chapter.

³⁹ Auyero 2001. On modes of problem solving in Latin America, see Collier and Handlin 2009.

⁴⁰ Fenno 1978.

TABLE 1.1. *Studies of Nonprogrammatic Distributive Politics, Coded by Type*

Country	Author, Publication Year	Time Period	Program	Type of Nonprogrammatic Strategy
United States	Wright 1974	1933–1940	New Deal federal spending in states	Nonconditional benefits and vote buying
United States	Levitt and Snyder 1995	1984–1990	Federal spending in congressional districts	Nonconditional benefits and pork
United States	Herron and Theodus 2004	1999–2000	State assembly to districts (Illinois)	Nonconditional benefits and pork
United States	Ansolahehere and Snyder 2006	1957–1997	State governments to counties	Benefits and pork
United States	Chen 2008	2004	Federal emergency aid in Florida	Nonconditional benefits
United States	Berry et al. 2010	1984–2007	Federal spending in Congressional districts	Nonconditional benefits and pork
Sweden	Dahlberg and Johansson 2002	1998	Environmental grants to municipalities	Pork
Sweden	Johansson 2003	1981–1995	Central government spending in municipalities	Nonconditional benefits and pork
Canada	Crampton 2004	Mid-1990s	Job creation fund	Nonconditional benefits
Canada	Miligan and Smart 2005	1988–2001	Regional development grants	Non conditional benefits and pork
Australia	Worthington and Dollery 1998	1981–1982, 1991–1992	Commonwealth grants to states	Pork
Australia	Denemark 2000	Early 1990s	Sports stadiums	Pork
Italy	Golden and Picci 2008	1953–1994	Infrastructure	Pork
Italy	Chubb 1982	1950s–1970s	Multiple types	Patronage and vote buying

(continued)

TABLE 1.1 (continued)

Country	Author, Publication Year	Time Period	Program	Type of Nonprogrammatic Strategy
Spain	Castells and Solé-Ollé 2005	Late 1980s–early 1990s	National infrastructure spending in regions	Pork
Portugal	Veiga and Pinho 2007	1979–2002	Municipal grants	Pork
Lebanon	Corstange 2012	2009	Cash, food, jobs, etc.	Vote buying
Japan	Curtis 1971	1950s–1960s	Cash and small gifts	Vote buying
Japan	Scheiner 2007	1990s	Public works	Pork
South Korea	Kwon 2005	1988–1997	National/ministerial spending in regions	Pork and vote buying
India	Chandra 2004	1990s–2000s	Public employment	Patronage
India	Rodden and Wilkinson 2004	1957–2003	National spending in states	Pork and vote buying
India	Cole 2009	1992–1999	Agricultural credits to states	Pork and vote buying
India	Khemani 2007	1972–1995	Fiscal transfers to states	Pork and vote buying
India	Vaishnav and Sircar 2010	1977–2007	School buildings	Pork
Taiwan	Wang and Kurzman 2007	1993	Minor gifts (cigarettes, tea)	Vote buying
Philippines	Schaffer 2007	2001	Cash, small gifts	Vote buying
Thailand	Hicken 2007	1970s–2000	Cash, small gifts	Vote buying
Mexico	Bruhn 1996	Early 1990s	PRONASOL funds center to states	Pork and vote buying
Mexico	Hiskey 1999	Early 1990s	PRONASOL funds to municipalities	Pork vote buying
Mexico	Magaloni 2006	1990s	PRONASOL funds to municipalities	Pork and vote buying

Mexico	Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estevez 2007	1990s	PRONASOL funds to municipalities	Pork and vote buying
Mexico	Molinar and Weldon 1994	Early 1990s	PRONASOL funds center to states	Pork vote buying
Brazil	Ames 2001	Early posttransition	Central government to municipalities	Pork and vote buying
Brazil	Rodden and Arretche 2003	1991–2000	Center transfers to states	Pork and vote buying
Peru	Schady 2000	1991–1995	Antipoverty, development funds from center to counties	Nonconditional benefits and pork
Venezuela	Hawkins 2010	2005	Targeted “mission” benefits to municipalities	Nonconditional benefits and pork
Argentina	Calvo and Murillo 2004	1987–2000	Fiscal transfers from center to provinces	Patronage, pork, and vote buying
Argentina	Lodola 2005	1995–1999	Workfare transfers to municipalities	Vote buying
Argentina	Gordin 2006	1983–2003	Fiscal and housing transfers to provinces	Vote buying and pork
Argentina	Weitz-Shapiro 2006	1995–2001	Workfare transfers to municipalities	Vote buying
Argentina	Nazareno, Stokes, and Brusco 2006	1995–1999	Workfare transfers to municipalities	Vote buying
Sub-Saharan Africa	Van de Walle 2003	1990s	Municipal and village building programs	Pork
Kenya	Barkan and Chege 1989	Early 1980s	Decentralization of public spending	Pork
Benin	Wantchekon	1990s	Local public goods	Pork
Benin and Senegal	Koter 2013	1950s, 2006–2007	Public goods, individual favors	Vote buying and pork

our coding of a large number of case studies of distributive politics, in all instances ones that are non-programmatic. We have excluded from the table cases in which we lack sufficient information to code them. For instance, was the politicized transfer of funding to Ghana's District Assemblies a case of nonconditional individual benefits or of clientelism? Banful's study indicates nonprogrammatic distribution, but without more information about the structure of parties and their interactions with voters, we hesitate to push the coding further.⁴¹ Still, it should be clear that many instances of distributive politics can be readily coded according to our scheme.

To summarize, a first question our study poses is, "How can we best distinguish among various forms of distributive politics?" Our answer is that the key distinctions are between ones that follow public, binding rules and those that do not and between strategies that attempt to influence voters and others that attempt to hold them more sharply to account.

1.2 BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT DISTRIBUTIVE POLITICS

Despite the very large number of excellent studies of clientelism and distributive politics, still some basic questions remain unanswered. Much progress has been made. However, core aspects of the topic remain poorly understood, which is what motivates us to write this book. In particular, we are dissatisfied with answers – including those we have offered in our own earlier contributions – to three basic questions.

1. How does nonprogrammatic politics, and especially clientelism, work?
2. What causes shifts away from clientelism and toward other, non-broker-mediated distributive strategies?
3. Which kinds of distributive politics are consistent with the norms of democracy, which are inconsistent, and why?

1.2.1 How Does Clientelism Work?

Despite a spike in academic studies and a good deal of attention in the policy world, we still lack an understanding of some facts about clientelism. One basic question that any reasonable theory should be able to answer is, "What types of voters tend to enter into vote-trafficking arrangements?" As the next chapter makes clear, our received theories fail at this basic task. The collective theoretical wisdom does a bad job explaining empirical regularities regarding the effect of *partisanship* on vote selling. It does a better job explaining the impact of *income* on vote selling: poor people are more likely to sell their votes. However, we don't have consistent explanations for *why* this is true.

A major contribution we hope to make with this book is to build a theory of clientelism that does a better job explaining what until now have been empirical

⁴¹ Banful 2010.

anomalies or incomplete explanations. The theory that we build in Chapter 3 begins with a series of observations about the informational requirements of clientelism. As a prelude to that more thoroughgoing discussion, we outline some of these observations now.

Under clientelism, parties distribute benefits to individuals and attempt to hold them accountable for their votes. The information required to carry off these rather remarkable tasks is substantial. Parties must know which voters and families need what kinds of help; a bag of rice for Juanita won't be helpful if what she really needs is medication for a sick child. (This problem would be ameliorated if parties bought votes with cash. They sometimes do so, but trading in cash facilitates brokers pocketing the benefits.) Parties also need to know who is likely to turn out without much additional prodding, who will vote for them come hell or high water, who will *not* vote for them come hell or high water, and who is on the fence. This information, what's more, may change over time: whether Juanita's child is still ill; whether Sanjay now has a job; whether Philip used to support the party but thinks it has performed badly in the last term. Monitoring the vote also requires parties to gather substantial information about the decentralized actions of individual voters. Both the delivery and the holding-voters-to-account sides of machine politics are demanding on the party as an information-gathering and -processing mechanism. This is true under public voting, all the more so once the ballot becomes secret.

To deal with these information demands, machines hire armies of intermediaries or brokers. The brokers go by a variety of names. They are *cabos electorais* (canvassers) in Brazil; *gestores* (facilitators) or *caciques* (political boss) in Mexico; fixers and *dalal* (middlemen) in India; *hua khanaen* (vote canvassers) in Thailand; *anggota tim sukses* (success team members) in Indonesia; and *porteurs de voix* (vote carriers), *relais électoraux* (electoral relays), or *vecteurs* (vectors) in Senegal. They were precinct captains in the United States and party agents in Great Britain. Of particular value are people who live in the same neighborhood as the set of voters for whose actions they are responsible. It's much easier for a neighborhood insider to know whose children are ill, who turned out in the last election and who stayed home, whether a voter turned against the party, or who seems to have defected and voted for an opponent, despite having benefitted from party largesse.

Brokers solve many information problems for machines. But they create problems as well. They are agents of the party whose actions cannot be exhaustively observed or perfectly monitored by the party. Did support collapse in a given neighborhood because the opponent did a good job poaching or because the party's broker sold the rice and kept the cash for himself? Did the broker work hard for the primary candidate, or was he secretly pushing for another candidate? Did he direct party resources toward responsive voters, or did he expend them on his cronies, who can help him boost his own career? Was the candidate a hard sell in that neighborhood, or was the broker inept?

These kinds of questions plague machine leaders. We find such doubts – the sense that one’s operatives in the neighborhoods, towns, and boroughs may be “parasites” and “traitors”⁴² – to be omnipresent, festering in the minds of party leaders from nineteenth-century Britain, to Gilded Age America, to contemporary Argentina or India. Their omnipresence suggests that they are structural, growing out of the very needs of parties to build organizations that insinuate themselves into the lives and networks of voters.

These observations about the informational and organizational settings of machine politics are at the center of our study. They help us to build a broker-mediated model of clientelism that solves persistent puzzles and explains enduring empirical anomalies.

In sum, our answer to the question, “How does vote buying work?” will turn on the role of the political broker. Although many studies of machine politics have noted the centrality of brokers, most have not sufficiently internalized the logic of broker-mediated distribution. Our micro-theory aims to expose the agency issues that characterize this relationship and develop a theoretical understanding of the ways in which clientelism thus brings both costs and benefits to party leaders.

1.2.2 The Macro-Logic of Transitions From Clientelism

In some countries, distributive politics has shifted over time from vote buying and other nonprogrammatic forms to programmatic politics. Why did this change occur?

By posing this question, we do not mean to suggest that a shift from non-programmatic to programmatic distribution is inevitable around the world. Still, in the United States, the George Washington Plunkitts have been displaced by less personalized, more bureaucratic organizations, and few victims of fires or natural disasters, even in the working-class neighborhoods of New York, Chicago, or other erstwhile machine cities, expect to receive aid from party bosses or ward-healers. In the same way, the modern-day British Labour, Liberal-Democrat, or Conservative parties would have little use for the vote-buying party agents on whom they used to rely. In other countries, clientelism and vote buying have declined but not disappeared. Gone are the days when Italy’s Christian Democratic party sent “pasta trucks” through the popular quarters of Naples or Palermo, in search of votes.⁴³ However, the Italian parliament in 2004 saw reason to pass legislation barring the introduction of cell phones into the voting booth. Voters were reported to be using the cameras in their phones to photograph their ballots, thus verifying that they had complied with implicit vote-buying contracts.

⁴² As explained in Chapter 8, party leaders in Britain and the United States saw their electoral agents and brokers in these and other unflattering ways.

⁴³ See Chubb 1981.

What explains such transitions, complete or partial? Simple answers, such as economic growth and modernization, tell only part of the story.

Just as it helps explain the internal micro-dynamics of clientelism, so the broker-mediated model helps make sense of the macro-dynamics of machine demise. Because leaders both rely on but suffer under their electoral agents, we should not be surprised that these same leaders play a role in cutting out the group of brokers when conditions are ripe. Grasping the imperfect agency relations between party leaders and their brokers helps us understand the macro-logic of transitions between clientelism and programmatic politics. As our analysis of the micro-logic of vote buying suggests, clientelism brings both costs – in the form of rent-seeking and inefficient targeting by brokers – as well as benefits to party leaders. Understanding the sources of these costs and benefits is thus crucial for understanding the emergence and persistence of clientelism. As our investigation of historical as well as contemporary cases suggests, party leaders often chafe at the inefficiency of their brokers. Transitions from clientelism have often involved leaders from different parties colluding against the entire class of brokers.

Structural forces such as economic growth and modernization influence the relative returns to clientelism, compared with other distributive strategies, and thus affect the incentives of leaders to subvert their machines. Social changes in the electorate induced by industrialization or economic development shape the terms of exchange between party leaders and brokers, as well as between brokers and voters. Population growth and urbanization make it harder for brokers to discern individual voters' electoral choices. Investments in party machines tend to bring constant returns: in light of the intensity and frequency of relations required between brokers and their clients, as the electorate grows, parties need to hire many more brokers. The political machine does not “scale” as well as more programmatic forms of political communication. The latter, in contrast, can involve heavy start-up costs but low fixed costs, leading to increasing returns to scale; when the costs to leaders of communicating directly with voters (i.e., without brokers) decline, the returns to programmatic strategies increase.

In sum, our answer to the question, “What causes shifts between clientelism and other forms of nonprogrammatic or programmatic distribution?” emphasizes macro or structural changes that enhance or erode the efficiency of brokers. When industrialization enlarges electorates, shifts the weight of electorates from poor to middle-class voters, and makes individual voters' actions harder to discern, the inefficiencies of the electoral agent will weigh all the more heavily on party leaders, tempting them to do away with their own machines. When party leaders undertake policies that enlarge the number of poor voters while also spurning their traditional constituencies, brokers will appear less wasteful and inefficient to leaders. The broker-mediated theory, then, helps unravel puzzles of clientelism, both as a steady state and as a strategy that rises and falls in distinct settings.

1.2.3 Distributive Politics and Normative Democratic Theory

We hope to help solve some puzzles in normative considerations of distributive politics. Earlier we framed the question as, “Where does one draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable forms of distributive politics?” By now it should be clear that not one line alone but several will need to be drawn. Most normative theorists of democracy would probably agree with the U.S. Supreme Court’s stance that a line should be drawn between public commitments and offers (which are legal and acceptable) and private, hidden side deals (which are not). However, even among practices that flout public, binding rules, some undercut democratic norms more than others. We have suggested, for instance, that democracy is less severely undermined when distributive strategies *influence* rather than *coerce* voters and hence that clientelism is more toxic than is unconditional partisan bias.

Figure 1.1 opens additional questions, as well. One of them is whether the practice of turnout buying should be subjected to as much opprobrium as is vote buying. Legal standards suggest that the answer may be no. Parties’ transporting or hauling voters to the polls is often legal, whereas paying them for their votes is not. That payments to voters are selective incentives to vote, and that the elimination of payments is often followed by a drop in turnout, is one of the justifications that is sometimes offered for vote buying; or at least this is considered a countervailing good that can mitigate the bad. This defense of private payments to voters raises questions, however, about the meaning of participation when it is purchased, a question we return to in the final chapter.

In addition to the participation justification of clientelism, others include that it is redistributive and that it is efficient. We take all three up in the final chapter.

1.3 WHY STUDY CLIENTELISM?

The forgoing discussion will, we hope, help answer this question. Nonprogrammatic distributive politics in general, and clientelism in particular, are puzzling phenomena. In the next chapter we see that political machines fail to give out goods in the way that theorists have long predicted, giving too much to the wrong kinds of voters. Partisan bias, clientelism, and patronage sometimes disappear from places where they have long been endemic and reassert themselves in places where they have never been prevalent. And if political philosophers and lay observers think nonprogrammatic distributions tarnish democracy, why don’t programmatic distributions of material benefits do so as well? In short, there are puzzles to solve. Sheer curiosity, we hope, will carry the reader into the following chapters.

Another reason why we – and many other scholars of the developing world – have taken up the problem of clientelism and distributive politics is

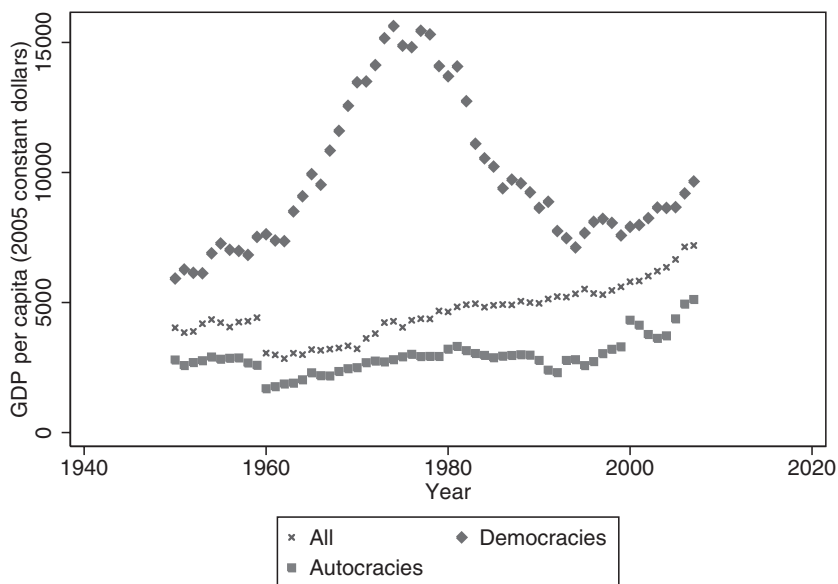


FIGURE 1.2. Median GDP per Capita Over Time: Democracies and Autocracies.

that it is widespread. The third wave of democratization brought into the club of democratic nations a set of countries that found themselves at considerably lower levels of economic development than the elite club of older democracies; hence, as a group, democracies became poorer. Figure 1.2 demonstrates this trend. The median gross domestic product per capita among all democracies peaked in the late 1970s, then declined sharply through the 1980s and mid-1990s, when most Latin American and European Communist countries democratized. The trend was reversed in the late 1990s, but by 2007 the median per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of democratic countries remained 50 percent lower than it had been at its peak. The downward movement in average per capita GDP among democracies is due to the growth in the number of democracies in the world.⁴⁴

A simple reason why clientelism, patronage, and other modes of nonprogrammatic politics have become important topics in the scholarly and policy communities is that there is an elective affinity between it and poverty; the birth of many new, poor democracies make it more prevalent. Yet we also see signs of the decline of clientelism, or at least major challenges to it, challenges epitomized by the *Progres/Oportunidades* program mentioned at the outset.

⁴⁴ Figure 1.2 uses Penn World Tables 6.3 and the Cheibub et al (2009) extension of the Przeworski et al. (2000) regime codings to code democracies and autocracies from 1950–2007.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In addition to this Part I – which introduced our conceptual scheme of distributive politics – the book that follows is divided into three more parts, each corresponding to one of the questions raised earlier.

Part II addresses the crucial question of how distributive politics works. Chapter 2, “The Gap between Theory and Fact,” uses original micro-level evidence from four developing-world democracies – Argentina, India, Mexico, and Venezuela – to underscore the lack of fit between positive political-economy models and real-world patterns. Most positive theories treat clientelist parties as single unitary actors, and they predict that *swing* or indifferent voters will be the chief targets of distributive largess. But this prediction finds little support in the cases we study. We then attempt to explain this empirical anomaly in three ways: by assuming that voter types (loyal voters, swing voters) are a by-product of distributive largess (*endogenous loyalty*); by assuming that largess is aimed at mobilizing voters to turn out, rather than persuading them to change their vote (*turnout buying*); and by positing that what appears in the data to be payments to loyal voters are actually payments to low-level brokers, whose task is to generate support among voters (*subcontracting*). Only this last alternative steps away from the assumption of clientelist machines as single unitary actors. None of the three effectively resolves the tension between theory and facts.

Chapter 3, “A Theory of Broker-Mediated Distribution,” attempts to close this gap. We analyze a formal model that builds on the basic idea that brokers – ground-level intermediaries between the party and voters – are imperfect agents of their parties. This model makes sense of empirical regularities that were anomalous from the perspective of earlier theories, such as the channeling of largess toward loyalists who were also committed non-abstainers. The broker-mediated theory generates a prediction more in line with the evidence: that political machines target loyal voters, even ones who are in no danger of abstaining, though without completely ignoring swing voters.

Having developed a theory with the “right” predictions, at least regarding the effect of voters’ ideological or partisan type on their chances of receiving party largess, much of the rest of the book further tests this theory. It does so by offering evidence in support of the theory’s basic assumptions, its claims and predictions, and its additional observable implications. Chapter 4, “Testing the Broker-Mediated Theory,” focuses on key assumptions of the broker-mediated model. These include that brokers are interested in extracting rents from their parties *and* in having their party win elections. We also show evidence that brokers are able to threaten party leaders with a withdrawal of blocks of voters whom they control. In addition, we show that party leaders, unable to observe directly either the types of particular voters or the effectiveness and efforts of brokers, use brokers to monitor and sanction voters and use party activity and electoral outcomes to try to monitor brokers. The evidence in Chapter 4 comes from a number of sources, including a unique survey of a probability

sample of 800 party brokers in Argentina. Our efforts to draw probability samples of brokers in four regions in Argentina – despite the non-existence of any obvious sampling frame – and our use of several survey experiments allow us to circumvent inferential difficulties that other kinds of studies frequently encounter.

Chapter 5, “A Disjunction between Leaders’ and Brokers’ Strategies?,” begins with the observation that if our theory is right, distributive politics should favor swing *districts* but loyal *individuals*. To test this observable implication, we again draw on original data sources as well as on studies of distribution from parties and central governments to regions, provinces, and localities from all major regions of the world, including the United States and Canada, Western European countries, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Chapter 6 explores our theory’s implications for the relationship between poverty and clientelism. A near-universal assumption in scholarly, policy, and lay discussions is that vote buying is basically a strategy aimed at low-income voters. Cross-national survey data support this assumption. So does our individual-level evidence from four developing-world democracies. There is less consensus about *why* the poor are most likely to sell their votes. Our model in Chapter 3 assumes diminishing marginal utility of income, an assumption we share with several other theories of machine politics. This assumption implies that the higher a voter’s endowment or prepolitical income, the more a party will have to pay the voter to overcome any disutility endured from voting against his or her preferred type. With limited and fixed budgets, machines start with poor voters and are decreasingly likely to target voters as one advances up the income distribution. Another explanation focuses on the risk aversion that is also implied by diminishing marginal utility of income. Here it is not the limited budget of the party but the unwillingness of the voter to accept an uncertain future reward, promised by a programmatic politician, instead of a steady flow of concrete benefits. We test diminishing-utility-of-income versus risky-programs explanations with original survey data.

Part III of the book shifts from contemporaneous to over-time dynamics of distributive politics. In Chapter 7, “Party Leaders Against the Machine,” we build on the broker-oriented theory and develop formally some predictions about the macro-historical conditions that might encourage, or discourage, clientelism and vote buying. Chapter 8, “What Killed Vote Buying in Britain and the United States?,” offers evidence relevant to the broker-mediated and macro-theories. It poses and offers answers to two historical questions. In nineteenth-century Britain and the United States, vote buying was a central feature of elections. Why did it subsequently basically disappear in both countries, displaced by more programmatic approaches to winning elections? And why, despite the similarities in this basic scenario of decline, did clientelism and machine politics persist longer in the United States than in Britain?

Our historical exploration offers much additional evidence of agency problems in the relation of party leaders and brokers. That these problems are

in such clear evidence in contexts historically and geographically remote from those in relation to which we developed the theory underscores that these problems arise out of the incentives and information asymmetries that these two sets of actors face.

The final section and chapter consider nonprogrammatic politics through the lens of normative theories of distributive justice. Normative considerations are clarified by the sharper picture of distributive politics which, we hope, will emerge from these pages. Chapter 9 poses the question, “What’s Wrong with Vote Buying?” (and other forms of nonprogrammatic distribution). Can it be justified on efficiency grounds? On redistributive grounds? On participation grounds? How does it measure up to theories of distributive justice? The answer to the last question – not very well – is no surprise. Yet there are nuances, depending on what kind of nonprogrammatic strategies we have in mind. It matters, we contend, whether the practice in question is pork-barrel politics – targeting groups or localities – versus the targeting of individuals, whether the goal is to change people’s votes or to boost turnout, whether goodies are given out to get supporters to the polls or to keep opponents at home, and whether the recipients of largess are party loyalists, swing voters, or opposition supporters.

1.5 A COMMENT ON RESEARCH METHODS

To probe the questions that animate this study, we use tools of theory, both positive and normative. Our empirical research, in turn, makes use of a multi-layered mix of strategies.⁴⁵ Drawing inferences about the quantities we study is challenging. In Chapter 2, for example, we assess the effects of voters’ partisan loyalty or ideological orientation on their receipt of benefits; yet, there are few ready natural experiments with as-if random variation in partisan loyalty.⁴⁶ Our approach depends on triangulation of evidence from many sources. We have conducted sample surveys of voters in Argentina, Venezuela, and India, and use publicly available individual data from Mexico, to make inferences about the kinds of voters whom political machines target. Our Venezuelan survey was designed to fill the gaps in an enormous database of Venezuelan voters that the Chávez government created. Although other social scientists have studied the Venezuelan government’s database, we are the first to be able to add crucial additional information, for example, about voters’ income levels, by matching voters sampled for our own survey to the records in the government’s database. We draw on original experimental research reflecting party and voting behavior in India. We have conducted open-ended qualitative interviews with party leaders, brokers, and voters in Argentina, Venezuela, and

⁴⁵ See the Appendixes, as well as discussions in the chapters, for more details about our data sources.

⁴⁶ Dunning 2012.

India. We are also able to draw on a vast and rigorous secondary literature and offer what we believe to be the broadest empirical review of ecological studies of distributive politics yet produced. And we have dug deeply into secondary historical materials to make arguments about the demise of at least some forms of nondistributive politics in several of today's advanced democracies. Thus we test different aspects of our theories using different research designs and unique datasets on voters, brokers, and leaders, combined with qualitative fieldwork. Each strategy on its own has some limitations, but together we believe they make a compelling case for the arguments we advance.

One empirical strategy that we make only cursory use of is large-N cross-national research. One reason has to do with the nature of our dependent variables. Like corruption, many forms of nonprogrammatic distribution are illegal, immoral (by local standards), or both, and no ready cross-national measures are available. That these practices are not socially desirable creates potential bias in the single-country measures and survey results that we do use. A promising approach, but one that is just getting off the ground as of this writing, is to gauge levels of vote buying through list experiments.⁴⁷ Even so, these studies tend to produce one-off measures of the level of vote buying at a single point in time. And the very anonymity they offer respondents then reduces the amount of individual-level information that they provide.⁴⁸ Beyond the intentional obfuscation by the actors involved, another obstacle to gathering valid cross-national measures is that context matters for the coding of our dependent variable. For this reason, another promising recent approach to the cross-national study of clientelism and other modes of party-voter linkages is elite surveys, in particular those carried out by Kitschelt and his coauthors.⁴⁹ As the next chapter makes clear, public spending may be programmatic or not, depending on the political context in which it is carried out and on how faithfully it reflects formalized rules. These are questions that scholars have addressed in particular national contexts, and a great deal can be learned by comparing the results of myriad country-level studies. But the importance of context makes simple large-N statistical comparisons treacherous. For these reasons, the few scholarly efforts to gather cross-national measures of clientelism, pork, or vote buying have not been particularly successful.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Corstange 2010, Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2011.

⁴⁸ Some analysts have attempted to extend list-item techniques to allow inclusion of individual-level data (see Corstange 2008), though these rely rather heavily on the assumptions of regression models for individual-level responses.

⁴⁹ See Kitschelt 2011.

