The Determinants of Success of Special Interests in Redistributive Politics (1996)

Avanish Dixit and John Londregan

Valerie Wirtschafter

- **Model Question:** Why do some groups get more distributive goods than others?

Introduction

- **Model Question:** Why do some groups get more distributive goods than others?
- **Voter Perspective:** For a political moderate who is indifferent between the political programs of the parties, differences in distributive policies is decisive.

Introduction

- **Model Question:** Why do some groups get more distributive goods than others?
- **Voter Perspective:** For a political moderate who is indifferent between the political programs of the parties, differences in distributive policies is decisive.
- **Party Perspective:** For a political party, the differential ability to target voters determines who be favored to receive goods

Model Assumptions

▶ Political parties have equal ability once in office to distribute benefits

Model Assumptions

- Political parties have equal ability once in office to distribute benefits
- Issue positions are fixed for a given election campaign

Model Assumptions

- Political parties have equal ability once in office to distribute benefits
- Issue positions are fixed for a given election campaign
- Grand or programmatic redistribution is not a factor in the model (e.g., social security programs)

Model Assumptions

- Political parties have equal ability once in office to distribute benefits
- Issue positions are fixed for a given election campaign
- Grand or programmatic redistribution is not a factor in the model (e.g., social security programs)
- In deciding how to distribute benefits, each party seeks to maximize its vote

Model Assumptions

- Political parties have equal ability once in office to distribute benefits
- Issue positions are fixed for a given election campaign
- Grand or programmatic redistribution is not a factor in the model (e.g., social security programs)
- In deciding how to distribute benefits, each party seeks to maximize its vote
- Individuals within each group are heterogeneous in their ideological beliefs

Model Description

The model begins with electoral competition between two parties: **R** and **L**

- ▶ **X** is an individual who shares an ideological affinity for party R or L

Model Description

The model begins with electoral competition between two parties: **R** and **L**

- ▶ **X** is an individual who shares an ideological affinity for party R or L
- ▶ **C** measures an individuals "economic material benefit," or their consumption

Model Description

The model begins with electoral competition between two parties: **R** and **L**

- ▶ **X** is an individual who shares an ideological affinity for party R or L
- ▶ **C** measures an individuals "economic material benefit," or their consumption
- ▶ **G** is an identifiable group distinguished by some characteristic (e.g., geography, wealth)

Model Description

The model begins with electoral competition between two parties: **R** and **L**

- ▶ **X** is an individual who shares an ideological affinity for party R or L
- ▶ **C** measures an individuals "economic material benefit," or their consumption
- ▶ **G** is an identifiable group distinguished by some characteristic (e.g., geography, wealth)
- ▶ **U$_i$(C$_i$)** the utility of a member of group i with consumption C_i

Model Description

The model begins with electoral competition between two parties:
R and **L**

- **X** is an individual who shares an ideological affinity for party R or L
- **C** measures an individuals "economic material benefit," or their consumption
- **G** is an identifiable group distinguished by some characteristic (e.g., geography, wealth)
- **U_i(C_i)** the utility of a member of group i with consumption C_i
- **K_i** measures how "apolitical" (or greedy) a voter is (also measure political convictions)

Model Description (continued)

- From a voter perspective, the model captures the trade-off between political ideology and economic benefit in determining the utility gained by voting for one party over the other

Model Description (continued)

- From a voter perspective, the model captures the trade-off between political ideology and economic benefit in determining the utility gained by voting for one party over the other
- From a party perspective, the purpose of the model is to find a balance between transfer efficiency and tax revenue in determining where to distribute goods

Model Description (continued)

- ▶ From a voter perspective, the model captures the trade-off between political ideology and economic benefit in determining the utility gained by voting for one party over the other
- ▶ From a party perspective, the purpose of the model is to find a balance between transfer efficiency and tax revenue in determining where to distribute goods

Model Predictions

- A group whose voters are relatively numerous at the cutpoint, or the point where they could switch their vote to the other party, will receive more favorable treatment.

Model Predictions

- A group whose voters are relatively numerous at the cutpoint, or the point where they could switch their vote to the other party, will receive more favorable treatment.
- Poor voters will receive more distributive benefits.

Model Predictions

- A group whose voters are relatively numerous at the cutpoint, or the point where they could switch their vote to the other party, will receive more favorable treatment.
- Poor voters will receive more distributive benefits.
- Group size matters in determining gains and losses with respect to votes per dollar transferred.

Model Predictions - Swing vs. Core

- Swing groups benefit more when a party doesn't have the ability to target benefits to or tax core supporters.

Model Predictions - Swing vs. Core

- Swing groups benefit more when a party doesn't have the ability to target benefits to or tax core supporters.
- If parties can effectively distribute transfers to any group than both parties will target groups that are in the center politically.

Model Predictions - Swing vs. Core

- Swing groups benefit more when a party doesn't have the ability to target benefits to or tax core supporters.
- If parties can effectively distribute transfers to any group than both parties will target groups that are in the center politically.
- If parties can better deliver goods and favors to its core voters, then they will provide these services to core voters in order to avoid leakage (this is known as "machine politics")

Impact

- Cited $1,428$ times
- Foundational model in distributive politics literature. Elaborated on by a range of scholars (e.g., Stokes (2005)).