

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

## PART I

### MODALITIES OF DISTRIBUTIVE POLITICS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 1

## 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.

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)

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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

**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.<sup>3</sup>

**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...”<sup>4</sup>

**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

<sup>1</sup> De la O 2012, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> See especially De la O 2012. See also Fiszbein and Schady 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Weitz-Shapiro 2011.

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Between Clients and Citizens*

5

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.’”<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Tam 2008, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Riordan 1994 [1905], *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, p. 6.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)

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."<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> Public goods may benefit all contributors, or they may subsidize public expenditures of narrower geographic constituencies.<sup>10</sup> Benefits may be irreversible (bridges) or reversible (public employment).<sup>11</sup> Parties make long-term and slow-moving investments in basic programs but campaign, on the margin, offering "tactical distributions."<sup>12</sup> Incumbents alone may control benefits exclusively (political monopoly) or they may be controlled by opponents who are economic monopolists.<sup>13</sup>

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

<sup>8</sup> Seymour 1970 [1915], p. 394.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Lizzeri and Persico 2004.

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

<sup>11</sup> Robinson and Torvik 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Dixit and Londregan 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Medina and Stokes 2007.

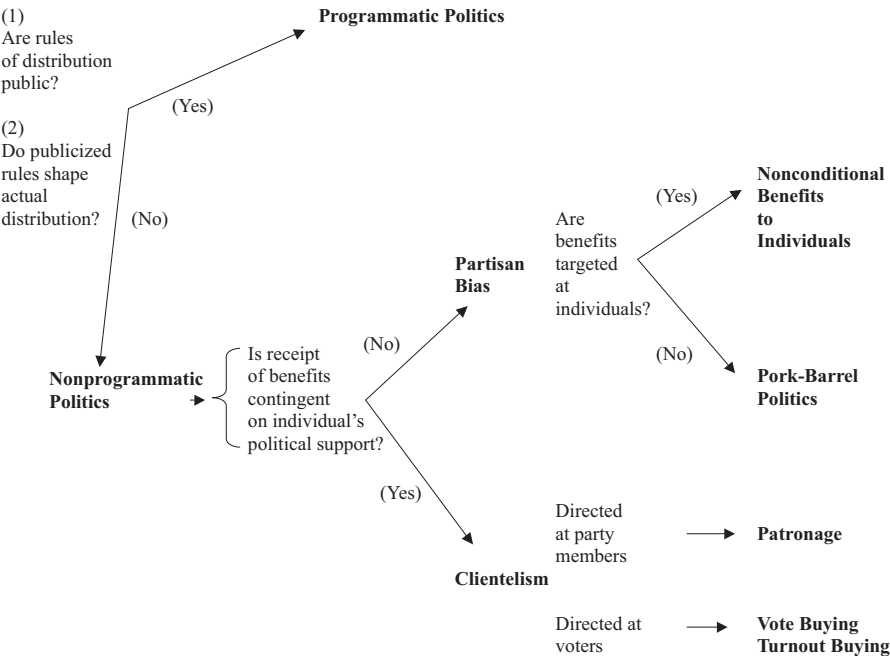


FIGURE 1.1. A Conceptual Scheme of Distributive Politics.

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.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)

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.<sup>14</sup> 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*

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



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Between Clients and Citizens*

9

*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.*<sup>15</sup>

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.”<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> Their study supports the

<sup>15</sup> Brown v. Hartlage p. 456 of U.S. 57, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> Brown v. Hartlage p. 456 of U.S. 57.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Boix 1998, Garrett 2001, or Hibbs 1987.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> Bickers and Stein 2000.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04220-9 - Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

Susan C. Stokes, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco

Excerpt

[More information](#)

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.<sup>20</sup>

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 Denemark, whose study suggests that this instance contrasted with normative expectations and normal distributive politics in Australia.<sup>21</sup> 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."<sup>22</sup>

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."<sup>23</sup> Teorrell investigated Swedish electoral practices in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries and found not a single incident of vote buying.<sup>24</sup> 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

<sup>20</sup> Levitt and Snyder 1995 p. 961. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>21</sup> Denemark 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Denemark 2000, p. 901.

<sup>23</sup> Papakostas 2001, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Teorrell 2011.