Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism

Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism addresses major questions in distributive politics. Why is it acceptable for parties to try to win elections by promising to make certain groups of people better off, but unacceptable – and illegal – to pay people for their votes? Why do parties often lavish benefits on loyal voters, whose support they can count on anyway, rather than on responsive swing voters? Why are vote buying and machine politics common in today’s developing democracies but a thing of the past in most of today’s advanced democracies? This book develops a theory of broker-mediated distribution to answer these questions, testing the theory with research from four developing democracies, and reviews a rich secondary literature on countries in all world regions. The authors deploy normative theory to evaluate whether clientelism, pork-barrel politics, and other nonprogrammatic distributive strategies can be justified on the grounds that they promote efficiency, redistribution, or voter participation.

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Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism

The Puzzle of Distributive Politics

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Sue: My deep appreciation goes to my sons, Sam, David, and Andy, whose curiosity about the world is inspiring, and to Steve Pincus, wonderful scholar and wonderful husband.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

When Sue Stokes first met Valeria Brusco and Marcelo Nazareno, at an academic conference in Buenos Aires, Valeria’s newborn baby, Lucía, slept quietly in a carrier by her mother’s side. Thad Dunning, as yet unknown to the rest of us, was just beginning graduate school.

Now Lucía Allende Brusco is a strapping teenager. She is learning Italian and likes jazz dance and boys. Thad is a tenured professor. In other words, it took us a long time to write this book.

Many things delay the completion of academic books. Classes must be taught, programs administered, other research projects attended to, children raised. But there are additional reasons for the delayed completion of this particular book.

More so than is usually the case, we were repeatedly stumped by evidence that did not fit received theories – or even common sense. The book is about distributive politics. The received theories usually predict that parties and governments will spend scarce resources on responsive voters. And these responsive voters will be fence-sitters, people who might otherwise not turn out or vote for the party responsible for the distribution but who could be swayed by a favor or a program. Yet over and over again, the evidence seemed to tell us that not fence-sitters but firm party loyalists were the primary beneficiaries of the distributive game.

Because we believed in the received theories, we discarded them only reluctantly. Like good Kuhnians, a few anomalies did not shift our paradigm. But eventually the weight of the anomalies was too much. Constructing an alternative theory was only one of the tasks we faced. Our new theory suggested new questions and new observational implications. Many parties can be decomposed into leaders and low-level operatives or brokers. If brokers play the distributive game by different rules than do their leaders, allocations of resources should come out differently when brokers are in control and when leaders are
Preface and Acknowledgments

in control. (They do.) If brokers are imperfect agents of party leaders, anti-machine reform movements, when they break out, may be driven as much by party leaders as by non-partisan reformers. (In several countries, they have been.) And if brokers are imperfect agents, it should be the case that they impose agency losses on parties and parties should devise elaborate techniques to monitor the brokers and minimize these losses. (We offer evidence that both are true.)

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