Pork, by Any Other Name...Building a Conceptual Scheme of Distributive Politics*

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Abstract

Sometimes parties or candidates get voters to support them not by promising desirable public policies, advertising their past record in office, making ideological appeals, invoking shared identities, or relying on partisan attachments. Instead they offer voters material inducement. But scholars are not sure what to call this last strategy or class or strategies. The problem is more than terminological: without a clear conceptual map, our attempts at causal explanation can be frustrated. Much research in distributive politics is implicitly motivated by a sense that these strategies depart from what is normatively desirable. Yet just as conceptual confusion obscures causal explanation, so it obscures normative considerations. This paper proposes a conceptual scheme to distinguish terms and concepts such as pork-barrel and distributive politics, clientelism, patronage, vote buying, and others. The distinctions are guided by the scope of strategies that one observes in the world and by their normative implications.
1 Distributive Politics and Conceptual Confusion

“[W]hat determines whether an interest group will receive favors in pork-barrel politics”? ask Dixit and Londregan in a widely cited theoretical paper.\(^1\) And what, one might add, is pork-barrel politics? Dixit and Londregan’s paper analyses “tactical redistribution,” by which they mean short-term shifts of resources to groups of voters, in contrast to “programmatic distribution,” which is more driven by ideology and stable over time. Absent a fully developed definition, Dixit and Londregan offer a set of examples of tactical redistribution: “subsidies or tariff protection to particular industries, location of military bases and construction projects in particular districts, and other schemes commonly labeled ‘pork barrel.’”\(^2\) Hence, pork-barrel politics can be given the more formal-sounding label of \textit{tactical redistribution}, which in turn is defined as distributive strategies that are called \textit{pork-barrel politics}. The paper is a classic; but the conceptualization of what, exactly, the authors are studying and how it differs from other forms of politics is frustratingly inductive and circular.

To deepen our understanding of tactical redistribution, we might look elsewhere for definitions of “pork-barrel politics.” By one definition, it entails public goods targeted at a narrow geographic constituency and paid for by a broader (e.g., national) constituency.\(^3\) Yet, in most countries (federalized or centralized), wealthy regions underwrite public programs in poorer ones. When tax receipts from Paris help defray the costs of public education in Lyon, is this “pork”?

Pork-barrel politics is a term that appears in research into distributive politics in the U.S. But not in all such research. Many empirical studies of U.S. distributive politics are about the impact of partisanship (of voters and of legislators) on the distribution of public programs. Levitt and Snyder, for instance, uncover a tendency of a Democratic-dominated House of Representatives to distribute more federal funds to

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\(^1\) Dixit and Londregan 1996, 1132.
\(^2\) Dixit and Londregan 1996, 1113.
\(^3\) See, e.g., Aldrich 1995.
legislative districts with large numbers of Democratic voters. The authors write about partisan “bias” in the distribution of these programs but do not use the term “pork.” If we were to take terminology literally, we would think that the studies by Dixit and Londregan and by Levitt and Snyder are about entirely different matters – one is about “tactical distribution” and “pork,” the other about “partisan bias” in the distribution of public monies. Yet one’s sense is that there is indeed some continuity between the two, both in topic and in motivation.

Studies of contemporary U.S. politics use terms like partisan bias, tactical redistribution, and pork. By contrast, historical studies of the U.S. speak of machine politics and of patronage. Even Levitt and Snyder, scholars of contemporary American politics who emphasize the central role of political parties in the distribution of material resources, avoid references to party machines. In studies of developing countries, political machines sometimes appear, but more frequently we see terms like clientelism and patronage. James Scott is unusual in self-consciously invoking machine politics in a study that is about the U.S. in an earlier era and about contemporary developing countries; his point is to force us to recognize the continuity between politics in the two settings. More commonly we practice a division of labor whereby students of advanced democracies study distributive politics, political historians of the U.S. study machine politics, and students of developing countries study clientelism. And those working on developing countries have not always been careful to explain how terms like clientelism, patronage, and vote buying differ from one another. Again, though scholars deploy different terms, the underlying phenomena share some crucial features in common.

Does it matter that we use different terms to refer to apparently similar constructs and the same terms to refer to somewhat different constructs? There are probably good reasons to tolerate some terminological diversity. One is that vernacular expressions from

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4 Levitt and Snyder 1995.
5 For a classic comparative study of “patronage,” in which the U.S. is one case, see Shefter 1977.
6 Scott 1969.
distinct historical periods and national contexts find their way into scholarly studies, a fact that is both inevitable and an antidote to excessive use of academic jargon. The *party machine* is one such term, used in the 19th- and early 20th-century U.S. popular press to describe party organizations. *Pork-barrel politics* has its origins in the era of slavery in the American South. Another example is the use, in the British context, of the terms *political corruption* and electoral *bribery*, colloquially and in the academic literature; though the underlying phenomena seem to be similar to those discussed earlier, these terms appear rarely in studies of the United States.\(^7\)

Perhaps Dixit and Londregan’s approach is a reasonable one. It’s hard to say in the abstract what pork or tactical redistribution are and how they differ from ‘normal’ – pork-free? – politics. But we know them when we see them. Yet while some conceptual looseness is acceptable, we do in fact pay a price for too much of it. I hope to demonstrate in this paper that we can benefit in several ways from a clearer conceptual and terminological map. One clear benefit is an enhanced ability to model the dynamics of particular strategies. A second benefit is that, with a sharper sense of underlying differences between similar strategies it becomes clearer what information scholars need to gather and report in order to distinguish them. A third benefit is that an understanding of the differences between seemingly like phenomena leads us to pose causal questions about what accounts for these differences. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a better conceptual map will allow us to pose normative questions in more precise ways.

Regarding the first benefit, often scholars of distributive politics have quite different contexts in mind but leave this context hazy. Our efforts at modeling and explaining the phenomena are consequently held back. To give an example, in the advanced democracies in an earlier era and in developing democracies today, one finds political parties that are socially proximate to voters. I call these parties *machines*. Machines can enforce implicit contracts – goodies in exchange for electoral support. In today’s advanced democracies, by

\(^7\) See, for instance, Seymour 1970[1915], and Cox 1987.
contrast, political parties are socially distant from voters. I call them *modern* political parties. This social distance means that modern parties cannot threaten individuals with retribution for failing to support them. The literature on distributive politics in developing democracies assumes machines, that on advanced democracies assumes modern parties, but they tend not to make these assumptions explicit.

The dynamics are very different, and voters’ objective functions are also quite different in the two settings. In advanced democracies voters who are responsive to material inducements are probably driven by *goodwill* toward modern benefactor parties, whereas in historical and developing-world contexts, voters are *selling* their participation and their votes to machines. Another difference is that the object of mobilization of modern parties are groups: voters in congressional districts, or classes of voters with certain features in common, or partisans. By contrast, political machines are able to target individuals. Our inherited terminology hints at these differences, but we lack explicit conceptual distinctions, mapping on terminological distinctions, that would make these differences explicit and of common understanding.

Conceptual clarification can force us to gather and report information that is often ignored but turns out to be crucial in defining what it is that we are actually studying. To continue the example offered earlier, some students of distributive politics do not make clear whether the parties that offer voters material inducements are machines (organizations with the structure and social proximity necessary to force individuals to comply), or whether, by contrast, they will only gain ‘compliance’ to the extent that they generate goodwill, goodwill that shapes voters’ decisions. Do politicians and party operatives live in the neighborhood amongst the voters whom they mobilize? How widespread are party organizations? What is the operatives’, and voters’, perception of whether the party can learn how an individual has voted and whether it can mete out punishments?

Not our positive models alone but also our normative judgements will be improved
by greater conceptual clarity. We might believe that, other things being equal, the more autonomy voters retain in making their electoral choices, the more likely it is that governments can be induced to represent citizens’ interests. When voters are relatively autonomous in the electoral choices they express, elections elicit better information about the distribution of citizen preferences, allowing for better representation of these preferences in public policy. Voter autonomy, on first glance, seems less compromised by the generation of goodwill than by the marketing of votes. I develop this example in more detail below of how clarifying both what is different and what is the same in these settings will aid us in formulating normative questions and evaluations.

2 A Conceptual Scheme

In this section I introduce a conceptual scheme that distinguishes among a number of the terms mentioned earlier. The task of conceptual clarification is aided by the branching diagram in Figure 1. It’s worth noting that each branch represents a conceptual distinction between types of electoral strategies, but multiple strategies can - and usually do - appear in a single polity; indeed, individual parties frequently deploy a mix of strategies.

The first branch introduces a basic distinction between two modes of electoral mobilization, one that relies on non-material appeals and another that relies on material inducements. Non-material appeals include campaigns emphasizing shared ethnic, regional, or religious (etc.) identities. Of course, such appeals frequently include promises of material redistribution to voters who are of the correct ethnicity, region, or religion, in which case these appeals would fall on the right-hand side of the first branch. Strategies fall on the left-hand branch when voters are responsive to them because they derive emotional satisfaction from being represented by one of “their own” identity group, without expecting material advantages to flow to their group as a result. Certain symbolic

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8 I use the term mobilization to refer to parties’ getting voters to turn out to vote and to vote for their candidates.
cues are deployed in campaigns to elicit emotional responses in voters: flags, stylized maps of lost homelands, depictions of people from other ethnicities. Parties sometimes use these symbols to mobilize support by stirring voters’ emotions, rather than promising them more income, better infrastructure, or other material benefits.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} See Edelman 1964. I hesitate to include ideological appeals under the rubric of the non-material. Ideology frequently entails visions of the world that include one or another pattern of distribution of material resources. Yet if promises to elevate a given ethnic, regional, religious, or other identity group can be considered as ideological appeals, then there is an area of overlap between ideological electoral mobilization and non-material mobilization.
Figure 1

Electoral Strategies

- Symbolic Appeals
- Material Resources

Programmatic

Non-Programmatic

(No bias)

Constituency Service

(No quid pro quo)

Distributive Politics
(including ‘pork’)

(Bias)

Clientelism:
Manipulation of
Public Policies
Vote Buying
Patronage

[1]

[2]

[3]

[4]
Proceeding down the right-hand side of Figure 1, the second branch introduces the crucial distinction between programmatic and non-programmatic strategies. Both entail material inducements: in both, parties try to get voters to support them by offering to improve or protect voters’ material wellbeing. To be programmatic, the proffering of such inducements must follow three steps. First, a public debate must take place about the objectives of the distributive program. This debate typically takes place during election campaigns and, after elections, among elected officials and is available, through the press, to the broader public; highly interested organizations and even individuals may, indeed, contribute to the debate. Next, whichever political force prevails in elections and in the legislative processformulates public policy, and the codified objectives of the policy must coincide with those enunciated by the prevailing political forces. Finally, the policy must be implemented in such a way that the publicly announced and codified objectives guide the actual distribution of the resource in questions.

Hence programmatic distributions are ones in which:

1. The objectives are a matter of public debate,
2. These objectives shape the official, codified criteria for distribution of the program or resource, and
3. The official criteria shape the actual distribution of the program or good.

It is not hard to imagine how each of these steps can be violated. Distributive schemes may be imposed with no prior public discussion; or the criteria of distribution of programs that have attracted public debate may be modified in important ways, outside of the public’s view. “Earmarks” or “rifle shots” are notorious ways in which legislators in the United States circumvent public discussion and direct favors to particular constituents. Efforts to quietly craft legislation so that it will benefit favored constituents can have ludicrous results. Consider the majority leader of the U.S. Senate, who wanted to channel

\[11\] The degree to which actual legislation mimics the debate of the ruling party, as opposed to being the result of compromises between this party or parties and the opposition, will depend on a number of factors – the majority status of government, the strength of parties, the role given to opposition in legislative committees, among others (on the last, see Powell 2001).
particular benefits to three specific hospitals in his state without appearing to do so. Harry Reid in 2009 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.”\textsuperscript{12}

Violations of the third step involve no effort to work special treatment into the language of legislation. Instead they involve ignoring what the legislation calls for and channeling benefits to people who would not receive them, or who would be given a lower priority, if official criteria determined actual distribution.

My emphasis on publicity as distinguishing programmatic from non-programmatic material distributions echoes legal theories of what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate electorally driven distributions. In Brown v. Hartlage (1982), the United States Supreme Court found that promises of material benefits made openly in campaigns, aimed at broad categories of constituents, was a form of speech protected by the First Amendment, as distinct from the trafficking in votes, which is illegal. The court wrote,

> The fact that some voters may find their self-interest reflected in a candidate’s commitment does not place that commitment beyond the reach of the First Amendment. 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. \textit{So long as the hoped-for personal benefit is to be achieved thorough 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.}\textsuperscript{13}

The court’s theory was that private deals, involving quid-pro-quo exchanges of votes

\textsuperscript{13} Brown v. Hartlage p. 456 of U.S. 57, emphasis added.
for material benefits, damage democracy as a whole, whatever their effect on the individual vote-sellers. The case was one in which Carl Brown, a candidate for public office in Kentucky, made a campaign promise to lower his salary to well below the legally fixed level, thus saving taxpayers’ money. His opponent accused him of violating state anti-vote-trafficking laws. The Court’s unanimous decision that Brown had not engaged in vote trafficking made much of Brown’s having announced the promise in a televised news conference. It also made much of his offer’s being to improve the material welfare of all taxpayers equally. Brown’s was not a private, secret offer, but was “made openly, subject to the comment and criticism of his political opponent and to the scrutiny of the voters.”

The U.S. Supreme Court does not have jurisdiction over internal procedures of the legislative branch. If it did, it might well find that rifle shots and earmarks fall outside of the “normal processes of government” and entail “private and corrupting arrangements.”

A common mistake is to equate programmatic policies with public goods and non-programmatic ones with goods that target individuals. Certainly it’s easy to generate stylized examples of programmatic public goods. National political parties’ campaign pronouncements discuss the value of reducing air pollution and various methods for doing so, and these debates continue after elections, as part of the legislative process. The winners pass a law the objectives of which are to reduce auto emissions. The law is then implemented in such a way as to maximize the improvement in air quality, within budget constraints, and is applied equally across the national territory and vehicle manufacturers.

Yet programmatic policies often target individuals and involve redistribution from some citizens to others. In advanced democracies, most welfare-state policies are both programmatic and targeted. Consider a stylized example of unemployment insurance. A public debate precedes the passage of such a program. The legislation enacting

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16 Kitschelt and Wilkinson make this equation. I later discuss differences between their conceptual map and mine.
unemployment insurance is consistent with the prior public debate. Finally, the actual implementation of the program follows the codified objectives. Hence, if the debate leads to the passage of legislation stipulating that unemployed people will receive insurance for a certain period of time and under certain conditions (such as that they actively seek work or enroll in training programs), then unemployment and training status would explain variation in whether a person does or does not receive benefits.

Non-programmatic distributive strategies – the right-hand side of the second branch – are ones that violate any of these three steps. There may be no public debate and publicly enunciated reasons justifying them, the public reasons may fail to shape the codified criteria of distribution, or the criteria stated in the legislation may fail to shape actual patterns of distribution.

Just as targeted benefits may be programmatic, public goods may be non-programmatic. In the U.S., what is known as pork are non-programmatic public or club goods.\footnote{“Club goods” are public goods for a subset of a population.} We have already seen that traditional definitions of pork – policies benefiting a subnational constituency but paid for by a broader set of constituents – strain to explain how it differs from other, more legitimate-seeming forms of distribution. In the conceptual scheme laid out in Figure 1, pork is a non-programmatic strategy to the extent that it is not the subject of public debate or the criteria of distribution do not map onto real distribution.

Non-programmatic public goods (such as pork) do differ in an important way from non-programmatic targeted goods. Because their consumption is non-exclusive, the threat to exclude individual voters for failing to support the benefactor party lacks credibility. The deployment of pork is therefore more likely to be effective in generating goodwill among voters than in enforcing an implicit vote-buying contract.

Targeted benefits may also be non-programmatic. If an unemployed person who is a member of the ruling party is more likely to receive benefits than is another unemployed...
person without this affiliation – all other things about the two people being equal – we would conclude that the policy was non-programmatic. Or if unemployed people in electorally marginal districts receive more generous benefits than those living in districts that are either a sure win or a lost cause for the party in power, then we would be in the terrain of distribution that is both targeted and non-programmatic. But without these features, the distribution is both individually targeted and programmatic. We should, then, reject the public versus individual-targeted divide as the basis for a distinction between programmatic and non-programmatic strategies.

This discussion underscores another mistake that one commonly encounters: the idea that pork-barrel distributions are motivated by politicians in search of electoral support whereas programmatic distributions are not. Both are politically motivated. Yet there is a sense in which programmatic distribution is better public policy than is non-programmatic, pork or targeted. The need to justify in public debate the reasons for a given distributive scheme constrains policy makers. They are hesitant to put forward public rationales such as that a public-works project in a district will help its incumbent representative get reelected, and are forced instead to make more general and constituent-oriented justifications. But politicians who successfully identify legitimate rationales and obtain public benefits for their constituents are by no means operating outside of the logic of electoral competition; they are merely winning a game with different rules.

Not all non-programmatic strategies are the same. The third branch in Figure 1 distinguishes between situations in which political operatives distribute resources with, or without, bias. Note that both branches below [3] involve discretion. Discretion distinguishes these distributive strategies from programmatic public policies, in which distributive criteria are explicitly codified and agents of the state generally eschew personal discretion to increase or decrease rewards. But discretion is not identical to bias. In the

\footnote{See Cohen 1989, and the contributions in Elster 1998.}
left-hand side of the third branch, local political operatives 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. Politicians 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. To the extent that their account is accurate, I call this form of distribution constituency service. By generating goodwill among constituents who receive assistance, and by allowing the politician to build a reputation for fairness and competence, constituency service is probably an effective electoral strategy. Obviously, additional criteria may enter into the politician’s calculations, such as the electoral responsiveness of the particular constituent or her past loyalty. These criteria can be thought of as “bias.” When bias guides the offers of personal help, we are on the right-hand side of the third branch.

The importance of bias to our conceptual scheme again conforms with legal theory. In the U.S. Supreme Court decision cited earlier, it was important to the Court that Brown’s offer “was to extend beyond those voters who cast their ballots for Brown, to all taxpayers and citizens.” His offer “scarcely contemplated a particularized acceptance or a quid pro quo arrangement.”19

Moving to the fourth and final branch of Figure 1, it distinguishes between two ways in which non-programmatic distributions translate into electoral support. In some settings, politically discriminatory distribution generates goodwill among recipients who are hence more likely to support the benefactor candidate or party, but recipients who defect and vote for other-than-the-benefactor party suffer no individual punishment. An unemployed British voter in the 21st century who votes for the Conservative candidate even after receiving benefits under a Labour government will not cease to receive benefits if Labour wins, assuming she remains unemployed and the program continues. In other

settings, the party offers material benefits only on the condition that the recipient returns the favor with a vote. The voter suffers a punishment (or reasonably fears that she will suffer one) should she defect from the implicit bargain of a goody for a vote.

Behind this distinction in the method of enforcement is a key organizational difference, alluded to earlier. The settings in which a quid-pro-quo understanding is absent - the left-hand side of our last branch - is typically advanced democracies in which political parties are no longer deeply embedded in social networks, but instead are more distant from voters. In recognition of a large literature in American politics that analyzes these settings, I label the left-hand side of the branch distributive politics. The logic of distributive politics is similar to that of programmatic distribution, public or targeted. The intention of parties, governments, and candidates who deploy programmatic distribution is to curry goodwill among beneficiaries, goodwill that translates into electoral support. But under distributive politics, one or more of the steps sketched earlier, from public debate to official criteria of distribution to actual distribution, is violated. On the bottom right branch of the figure, in today’s new democracies or advanced democracies in the past, parties are machines: highly decentralized organizations that rely on armies of local brokers and intermediaries who live among the people whom they were responsible for monitoring and mobilizing. These politicians and brokers are deeply embedded in social networks; indeed, in their daily activities they help to construct and keep alive these networks. Their social proximity allows them to gather information about who votes and whom they vote for – even assuming the secret ballot, they can make reasonably accurate inferences about individual voting patterns. I call the distributive strategies of party machines clientelism.

Under the rubric of clientelism fall three related phenomena. Manipulation of public policies involves the shifting of public programs away from their ostensible beneficiaries to other people in exchange for the latters’ votes. Only incumbents can channel public programs toward responsive constituencies. That this strategy is unavailable to opposition

\[20\] For a more extensive discussion, see Stokes 2005.
parties distinguishes it from vote buying.\textsuperscript{21} The manipulation of public policies is very much like distributive politics, but the quid-pro-quo aspect implies a decentralized party structure that, as explained, is deeply embedded in social networks. Later I discuss what is at stake normatively in the distinction between distributive politics, carried out with bias by modern parties, and the manipulation of public policies by machines. Vote buying, in turn, is the exchange of goods for votes before elections. Opposition parties can engage in vote buying as long as they have access to resources that do not depend on incumbency. Patronage is the exchange of public employment for electoral support. Because, generally speaking, patronage involves large rewards (a steady and secure income), it is exchanged not for a single vote but for broader electoral support and tends to go to party activists. Like the manipulation of policy, only incumbents can practice patronage.

3 Where do Major Studies Fit in this Conceptual Scheme?

To make the scheme more concrete, Figure 2 offers examples of studies the subject matter of which falls into one or another category. Beginning at the second branch, Douglas Hibbs’s account of American politics as shaped by class interests, interests that map onto the policies of Democratic and Republican parties, is clearly about programmatic politics.\textsuperscript{22} Here parties act strategically, motivated by a desire to mobilize electoral support from broad categories of citizens. They offer policies that promote the welfare of their class constituents. Public debates acknowledge the distributive nature of their policies – who is helped and who is hurt – and there no discretion or individualized bias in their allocation. Many examples of studies from other advanced democracies could also be cited, including the extensive literature on European social democracy and corporatism. Moving down Figure 2, Richard Fenno’s \textit{Home Style} is a rich account of constituency service, and

\textsuperscript{21} Federalized systems, in which subnational governments can make allocation decisions, open the possibility of parties that are in opposition at the national level using discriminatory public policy strategies.

\textsuperscript{22} Hibbs 1987.
other in-district activities, of members of the U.S. congress, generally delivered indiscriminately to all comers.\textsuperscript{23} The criteria of distribution are district residence and need. In turn, when services or public-policy benefits are delivered with bias toward responsive voters, and when the setting is one in which politicians lack the organizational capacity to hold voters (perversely) accountable for the votes,\textsuperscript{24} we are at the bottom left branch, in the realm of distributive politics. The Levitt and Snyder paper cited earlier is an example of a study that demonstrates the biased distribution of public programs with modern, socially distant political parties. Levitt and Snyder implicitly assume that the powerful parties involved lack the social proximity needed to punish individual voters; the authors steer clear of any mention of the political machine.

\textsuperscript{23} Fenno 1978.
\textsuperscript{24} See Stokes 2005.
Figure 2

**Electoral Strategies**

- **Identity politics**
- **Material Resources**

**Programmatic**
- Hibbs, *American Political Economy*
- (No bias)

**Non-Programmatic**
- (bias)

**Constituency service**
- Fenno, *Home Style*
- (No quid pro quo)
- (Quid pro quo)

**Distributive Politics**
- Levitt/Snyder (US)
- Dahlberg/Johansson (Sweden)
- Arulampalam et al (India)?
- Schady (Peru)

**Clientelism:**
- Manipulation of Public Policies: e.g., Nazareno et al., Lodola

**Vote Buying**
- E.g., Argentina studies cited

**Patronage**
- Chubb (Italy)
Still on the left side of the last branch, Dahlberg and Johansson study the distribution to municipalities of “ecological funds” in the run-up to 1998 Swedish elections. The incumbent Social Democratic party eschewed formulas in deciding which municipalities would benefit. Dahlberg and Johansson show that the government favored municipalities that were politically marginal: where public opinion was evenly divided in favor of and against the incumbent party. These authors do not discuss the organizational structure of the Swedish Social Democratic party, but one assumes that it was not spying on voters and threatening to cut them off from future support if they defected to the other side. After all this is Sweden. Hence this appears to be a case of distributive politics: biased distribution of programs by modern, socially distant parties. One would like to know more about how the funds were spent and whether the ruling party expected electoral gains from the targeted effects of the program (e.g., employment gains) or from its public-goods benefits (e.g., a cleaner local environment). If the latter, we have here Swedish pork.

There is plenty of evidence of the manipulation of public programs in developing countries. Decentralized ruling parties with strong insertions into social networks – incumbent machines – channel benefits from ostensibly public policies to individual voters, using voter responsiveness as a criterion of distribution and threatening, implicitly or explicitly, that benefits will be cut off if the beneficiary does not provide appropriate political support.

Vote buying is the topic treated by Levitsky; Brusco et al.; Stokes; Nichter; Szwarcberg; and other students of Argentine clientelism, who convey the tight bond, entailing both help and threats, between political parties and working-class voters in that country. Auyero’s masterful account seems also to be about vote buying, given that

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26 For examples from Argentina, a well-studied case, see Nazareno et al. 2006, Lodola 2006, and Weitz-Shapiro 2007.
27 What kinds of voters will benefit – core supporters, swing voters, likely participants, likely abstainers, or some combination – is a matter of theoretical debate. See Dunning and Stokes 2008, Gans-Morse et al. 2009; for a review, see Stokes 2007.
28 Levitsky 2003, Brusco et al. 2003, Stokes 2005, Nichter 2008, Szwarcberg 2009. Nichter distinguishes between vote buying and turnout buying, using individual inducements to get abstainers to turn out and
incumbency does not appear to be necessary for those dispensing goodies.\textsuperscript{29} Auyero sees the interactions of voters and party brokers in less transactional terms than do other students of Argentine clientelism. Brokers involve voters in “networks of personal assistance.” The help party operatives offer instills in voters a sense of friendship and obligation, which in turn translates into electoral support, participation at rallies, and other forms of political collaboration. Nevertheless, a sense of threat lurks in the background in Auyero’s study, serving as a weapon that brokers can and do wield against uncooperative neighbors.

In new democracies, not all biased distributions of public policy involve machines. Schady demonstrates bias in the distribution of anti-poverty programs in Peru in the 1990s. Yet the Fujimori administration ruled without recourse to a grassroots political machine. It therefore probably counted on the goodwill that the anti-poverty funds might generate in electorally marginal districts, rather than on punishing uncooperative voters. I categorize material strategies in India analyzed by Arulampalam and co-authors as distributive politics, but am less confident about the micro-mechanisms involved. The authors discuss “goodwill” as the motivator of voters, but one would like more information about the texture of relations between voters and parties.

Just as not all biased distribution of public programs in developing democracies is carried out by machines, not all public programs in developing countries are distributed with bias – some are pure public policies.\textsuperscript{30} Several prominent conditional cash transfer programs benefit citizens who qualify and who comply with the conditions, without bias: these are programmatic distributions. Why governments have eschewed clientelism in places like the Brazilian Northeast or rural Mexico, where earlier it was widespread, is an important question to answer.

The rich studies of Italian politics carried out by Chubb offer examples of vote

\textsuperscript{29} Auyero 2001.

\textsuperscript{30} See De la O 2009, Fried 2009.
buying and of biased distribution of programs with powerful punishments against defectors. But her focus is on what I call patronage: the trading of public-sector jobs, or of promises of future employment, in return for political support.³¹

Where in this scheme would one locate influential theoretical treatments of the politics of material inducements? The answer is that it is not always clear; key information is sometimes omitted. This is not necessarily a criticism of the theories in question – they aim for a high level of generality by omitting background contextual assumptions, but it does suggest difficulties in assessing the significance of the distributional games that they model. Consider first Cox and McCubbins’s “Politics as a Distributive Game.”³² The authors assume political parties that make announcements about how, in office, they will redistribute material resources; these announcements are assumed to be credible. Voters may or may not respond by voting for the benefactor party. Groups of voters vary in their responsiveness to distributions. To the extent that parties wish to reduce risk – to minimize the variability in voters’ responses to the party’s offers – they will favor their core constituents.

Cox and McCubbins offer as interpretations of distributive mechanisms “patronage, or the manipulation of the incidence of taxation, or allocating other distributive benefits of government...”³³ Politicians have no ideological commitments and seek to target the most electorally responsive voters. Whether these strategies are programmatic or not depends on whether one can imagine open public debates in which parties advertise their intention to carry out these kinds of distributions. Cox and McCubbins do not explain the manner in which parties communicate distributive offers to voters. My sense is that this is a story of non-programmatic politics, with distributive schemes making their way into public policy but short-cutting public discussions. But what kind of non-programmatic strategy? Given that parties target groups of voters, and given that Cox and McCubbins assume the

³² Cox and McCubbins 1986.
³³ Cox and McCubbins 1986, 373.
credibility of candidates’ offers and make no mention of coercive threats, the setting seems most like distributive politics: biased, non-programmatic distributions by modern parties that are socially distant from voters and must rely on voters’ responding to their distributions with goodwill. If “goodwill” seems a foreign concept in a rationalistic model like Cox and McCubbins’s, this apparent inconsistency represents a failure of the authors to work fully through the model’s microfoundational assumptions.

Lindbeck and Weibull’s model of distributive politics is in many ways quite different from Cox and McCubbins’s, particularly in their result that parties distribute to marginal or swing voters, rather than to core supporters. Yet in another way, the two models are similar. The redistribution that Lindbeck and Weibull envision could operate through public programs and tax legislation. But what would the parties say they are doing? As in Cox and McCubbins, Lindbeck and Weibull leave a good deal of context to be filled in.

Turning to Dixit and Londregan’s paper, these authors assume two parties that compete for the support of voters, who have ideological dispositions but also care about redistributive benefits. As before, parties deal with groups of voters, and the credibility of their offers is assumed. A crucial variable in Dixit and Londregan’s model is the proximity of parties to particular groups of voters. In one setting, the parties lack close connections to any particular group. In the other, one party has such a close connection with at least one group, its core constituency. The existence (in the second setting) of a core constituency means that a party can deliver benefits efficiently, with little waste; and these core constituents are favored by this party. Hence Dixit and Londregan get a “core” result, like Cox and McCubbins’s, though through a different logic. In Dixit and Londregan’s first setting – where no party has a core constituency – the results are much like Lindbeck and Weibull’s: goodies go to groups with many swing or “moderate” voters. As earlier, it does not seem impossible that Dixit and Londregan’s first setting involves programmatic distributions. But more likely we are in a world of distributive politics:

34 Lindbeck and Weibull 1987.  
35 Dixit and Londregan 1996.
non-programmatic distribution by socially distant parties. The “core” case is consistent with clientelism. And, indeed, the illustrations that the authors use in this setting come from historical machines in the United States. Dixit and Londregan seem to have in mind parties using public resources for tactical redistribution; hence their core or machine case appears to be the manipulation of public policy, rather than vote buying. Yet, like Cox and McCubbins, Dixit and Londregan allow both parties that compete to offer programs, and their campaign promises are (by fiat) credible. On this interpretation, this is vote buying.

A series of studies, following Stokes, assume political machines that can glean information about voters’ choices (and, following Nichter, about their turnout history). Voters and machines are in an infinitely repeated prisoners’ dilemma. These are clearly models of clientelism, rather than of distributive politics. Yet note that the models assume that only one party is a machine. It competes against a party that does not engage in clientelism (call this the single-machine assumption). One natural interpretation of this assumption is that, since only incumbents control the allocation of public monies, these are models of the manipulation of public policy. But reality offers instances in which non-machine incumbent parties compete against machines that are in opposition. Another interpretation of these models is that only one party (the machine) has in the past made the investment in a dense organizational structure; this organizational difference, rather than incumbency, could account for the single-machine competition. These models would be improved with a more developed interpretation of the single-machine assumption, and, ideally, they would endogenize parties’ choice of organizational structure.

By locating empirical and theoretical studies in the conceptual scheme, I hope to have clarified one’s vague sense, on reading them, of continuities yet differences among them. But this exercise has also identified lacunae in the literature. Empirical studies need to fill in more political context: are parties relying on the goodwill of voters who receive benefits from them? Do they rely, instead, on the ability of grassroots operatives to gather

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fine-grained information about voters’ actions? These lacunae afflict theoretical papers as well, and these papers would further be strengthened by clarifying the ways in which parties communicate their distributive offers to voters. Do these communications sound like the pronouncements we usually hear in political campaigns (in which case the policies that follow them might be programmatic) or must they take some other, more covert form?

4 From Conceptual Scheme to Causal Questions

The conceptual scheme displayed in Figure 1 suggests causal questions. The key one is, What causes parties to use programmatic or non-programmatic strategies? This important question has been addressed by students of particular national contexts where strategic change has occurred over time. And some scholars have posed it as a comparative, cross-national question. Temporally, the shift tends to be from a preponderance of non-programmatic to programmatic strategies, a path followed by countries such as Britain and the United States as well as – more tentatively – by Japan, Italy, and Mexico. Some cases have been identified, however, in which clientelism has increased over time. Economic development plays a central role in the decline of clientelism in most accounts. One main reason, underscored by the foregoing discussion, is that rising incomes make vote buying more expensive. But another reason is that machines become harder to sustain in wealthier countries: the counterparts of developing-world brokers, who maintain densely networked organizational structures, in wealthy countries have alternative employment

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37 For a sense of the depth of the transition in Britain, compare accounts of vote buying, including, basically, spot markets for votes, in Seymour, with studies of contemporary politics in the UK. An explanation of this transition is to be found in Cox 1987. For an account of the transition in Mexico, see Magaloni 2006. On Japan, see Scheiner 2007. Kitschelt 2007 offers an account of the decline of clientelism in advanced democracies. See also Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estevez 2007

38 In Argentina, as explained by Levitsky 2003 and by Brusco et al. 2003, the Peronist party relied more heavily on clientelism to mobilize electoral support after abandoning its welfarist platform in the 1990s and opting for a neoliberal program. The Argentine experience suggests that program and clientelism are indeed substitutes.

39 More precisely, to the extent that wealthier countries have less income inequality, and that the budgets machines have to spend on purchasing political support is a function of mean incomes, a given sum in offer for a vote will purchase less utility for the poor, and cost more utility to the wealthy, than in countries with lower incomes.
opportunities, other than monitoring their neighbors’ voting patterns.

The scheme in Figure 1 suggests a less commonly posed question. In wealthier countries, unpropitious environments for political machines, what explains parties’ choice of programmatic distributions versus distributive politics? Why do we suspect that the instance of distributive politics in Sweden revealed in Dahlberg and Johansson’s study is a rarity, whereas distributive politics and pork appear to be integral parts of the political process in the United States and Japan? The near parity in their levels of economic development leads us to suspect that institutional factors are part of the story. But which institutions? Single-member districts, personalistic campaigns, federalism, uncompetitive party systems have all been mentioned, though, given that parties and politicians shape institutions, problems of endogeneity are vexing. Kitschelt identifies political-economic governance structures as the key variable. But the answer to the question, Why distributive rather than programmatic distributions? has not been fully answered.

I have argued, then, for a conceptual scheme that distinguishes programmatic from non-programmatic politics, unbiased from biased distributions, and distributions undertaken by modern parties (which cannot enforce quid-pro-quo arrangements and rely on voter goodwill) from those undertaken by machines (which can impose punishments on defectors). These distinctions have highlighted continuities among strategies to which scholars have attached different labels and differences among strategies that go under the same label. We have, I hope, seen some payoffs, such as highlighting gaps in the empirical information and theoretical assumptions in studies of material strategies. In the next section, I suggest ways in which our normative evaluations, always lurking in the background in studies of distributive politics, are sharpened by the proposed conceptual scheme.

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40 Kitschelt 2007.
5 What’s at Stake? Normative Implications of Conceptual Distinctions

At each branch in Figure 1, distinctive normative implications come into play.\textsuperscript{41} Beginning at the second branch, I outlined three steps that must be followed if a distributive strategy is to be considered programmatic: it must be informed by a public debate, the policy must codify the criteria of distribution implied by this debate, and these criteria must actually determine the distribution. This process – admittedly stylized and probably never perfectly realized – promotes two goods. One is transparency in the allocation of public resources. The other is public-policy processes that are more deliberative. Theorists of democracy contend that deliberation has the effect of forcing decision-makers to adopt rationales that are more other-oriented and driven by general conceptions of justice. Some empirical evidence supports their contentions.\textsuperscript{42}

Probably the most common defense of clientelism is that it is redistributive and responsive to the needs of individual citizens and their families. The Weberian state is a distant and indifferent entity, whereas the party machine knows its constituents intimately and can respond to their particular needs. Yet the third branch of Figure 1 forces us to confront a distinction between fine-grained, discretionary assistance delivered in a universalistic manner – to all constituents, according to their need (\textit{constituency service}) – versus such fine-grained assistance that goes preferentially to certain constituents, depending on their electoral value. It is difficult to conjure up a justification, rooted in democratic theory, for such instrumental use of voters by parties or for the bias that it implies. Citizens’ interest in responsive parties and assistance in dealing with particular needs argues for constituency service rather than for the range of other non-programmatic strategies.

Turning to the final branch, a comparison of distributive politics and manipulation

\textsuperscript{41} The normative implications of symbolic or identity politics versus the politics of material inducements – the first branch – is a vast topic that I do not discuss.
\textsuperscript{42} Cohen 1989.
of public policies poses the following question. From the standpoint of normative
democratic theory, is there a meaningful difference between (1) parties’ channeling – with
bias and without public justification – goods to voters, thus generating voters’ goodwill
and hence electoral support; and (2) parties channeling – again with bias and without
public justification – goods to voters with the threat that they will cease to do so if voters
fail to support them? If our hunch is that goodwill is more democratic than punishment,
does this hunch stand up to scrutiny?

Vote buying and selling are illegal in most democracies, whether in places in which
machines operate or in which all parties are modern, in the sense explained earlier. Some
legal bans rest on equality grounds. If people’s utility income declines as their income
grows, then parties will be able to buy more votes among the poor than among the wealthy.
People who sell their votes gain from the payment they receive but lose the ability to use
their vote to express opinions and preferences. Vote-buying parties can keep these voters in
their camp by continuing to pay them directly and do not have to gain their support by
providing public policies that they favor. Public policy in systems with extensive vote
buying will tend to favor the wealthy. It is not the case, furthermore, that those who sell
their votes are simply demonstrating that they value the payment they receive more highly
than they do the influence over public policy that they give up. Individual voters do not
change the outcome of elections and hence do not change public policy. A vote seller who
wanted to regain influence over public policy would have to mount a campaign to get
thousands or perhaps millions of his fellow citizens to forgo the practice.

For less consequentialist reasons, as well, considerations of equality militate against
the trafficking in votes. Robert Dahl has enunciated a democratic Principle of Equal
Consideration of Interests: “…during processes of collective decision-making, the interests
of every person who is subject to the decision must (within the limits of feasibility) be

43 In some countries, like the U.S., vote trafficking – buying and selling – is illegal. In others, like Argentina,
only vote buying is illegal.

44 The collective-action problem posed by vote buying is highlighted especially by Kochin and Kochin 1998.
accurately interpreted and made known.”\(^\text{45}\) But vote sellers do not send information about their interests, which therefore cannot be accurately interpreted. How big should the state be? What are the appropriate dimensions of income transfers, and how should they be carried out? A person whose vote is purchased for an individualized payment is, for all practical purposes, lost to the process of collective decision-making. That these people are likely to be poor makes the damage done to democratic equality all the greater.\(^\text{46}\)

These considerations are not absent in the case of the voter who benefits from the biased distribution of programs from modern parties, but they are muted. The benefits she receives will presumably shape her vote – otherwise why would a vote-seeking party bother delivering them to her? – but she is not, in effect, forced to ignore other considerations in deciding how to vote, considerations such as the policy platforms of competing parties or the incumbent’s performance. She remains a more autonomous decision-maker than is the vote seller, her vote more informative of her preferences. And elections involving voters who receive distributive rewards, but free of machine coercion, offer a better read on voters’ preferences than do ones involving the clients of machines. The greater the informativeness of elections, in turn, the more the more scope for representative governments.

One might think that there is little at stake in what form of clientelism dominates – manipulation of public policy, vote buying, or patronage. Yet perhaps this is wrong. When not just incumbents but opposition parties also can operate like machines, it may be that elections are more competitive and less prone to the entrenchment of a dominant party, shored up by clientelism, as was the PRI in Mexico, the Christian Democratic Party in Southern Italy, and the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan. If so, we would prefer vote buying over the manipulation of public policy. Patronage may be the least salutary strategy of all: it turns clients not only into uninformative voters but also into agents of the state itself, captured by patrons.

What if people who accept payments from machines are not selling a vote for the

\(^{45}\) Robert Dahl 1987, 86.  
\(^{46}\) For a more extended discussion, see Stokes 2006.
machine’s candidate but simply committing to show up at the polls? What if, in Nichter’s terms, machines are buying not votes but turnout? In most democracies it is also illegal to pay people not to abstain, but parties are often permitted to do things to defray the costs of voting, such as transporting people to the polls. Certainly participation is generally considered a good in democratic theory. Equality considerations in some ways militate in favor of paying people to turn out. There is evidence from many countries that poor people are more prone to abstain. The same logic of diminishing marginal utility of income invoked earlier helps explain this fact: the poorer the individual, the greater a given cost of voting weighs on them.

Yet as long as distributive practices remain in the hands of political parties, how does one disentangle turnout buying from vote buying? How does a voter understand that a given party has paid him to vote (or defrayed the costs of his voting) but does not expect him to vote for that party? The problem seems to inform legislation even in places with modern political parties, ones with little capacity to infer the votes of individual citizens or punish defectors. Hasen notes that California law allows voters to receive incentives for voting “so long as the incentives are not offered to induce a voter not to vote, or to vote or refrain from voting for a particular candidate...” It’s easier to imagine turnout-buying arrangements that are not necessarily also vote-buying arrangements when they are undertaken by modern parties than by machines. Modern political parties typically have some capacity to improve turnout, little capacity to punish individuals who abstain, and basically no capacity to uncover defections on the part of particular individuals to the other side. But the cleanest way to separate the two would be to take turnout buying away from political parties and place it in the hands of non-partisan entities – in which case we are no longer anywhere in Figure 1.

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47 Nichter 2008.
48 Though, viewed from the perspective of opportunities costs for their time, the opposite would be true.
49 Hasen 2000, 1355, emphasis added.
50 For arguments in favor of paying people to vote, see Karlan 1994.
6 Conclusion: Competing Conceptual Scenarios

To conclude, the conceptual scheme offered here is not the only one conceivable. Legal theorists adhere to a dichotomous scheme, which distinguishes vote trafficking (the direct sale by citizens of their votes to candidates or parties as a quid pro quo for a payment or benefit) from the legitimate, implicit exchange of votes for material promises offered to large categories of constituents. One occurs in private, the other in public. This difference between “wholesale” and “retail” vote buying parallels mine between programmatic and non-programmatic material distributions, but focuses exclusively on whether campaign promises are public and involve quid pro quos while remaining mute on the post-election crafting of policies and their implementation.\(^{51}\) By ending basically at the second branch of Figure 1, the wholesale-retail dichotomy ignores normatively troubling (and, in some settings, illegal) phenomena, such as the hidden bias in the distribution of public programs. The omission excludes the most common form of non-programmatic distribution in the U.S. context, distributive politics. This omission limits the relevance of these studies in their American setting to occasional and fairly anachronistic practices.

A trichotomous, and hence more subtle, scheme is offered by Kitschelt and Wilkinson.\(^{52}\) They distinguish three types of “citizen-politician linkages”: \textit{programmatic valence policy competition}, \textit{programmatic policy competition}, and \textit{clientelistic competition}. Both versions of programmatic competition correspond, roughly speaking, to “programmatic distribution” in Figure 1; their clientelistic competition corresponds to all forms of clientelism in the figure. Several key differences separate their scheme from the one laid out in Figure 1. Theirs identifies all programmatic forms of competition with the distribution of public or club goods. “Private goods” distribution happens only under clientelism. I have argued, against this view, that programmatic material distribution often involves private goods; Kitschelt and Wilkinson would have to classify unbiased

\(^{51}\) Karlan 1994 coins the terms “wholesale” and “retail” in this setting.

\(^{52}\) 2007. See also Kitschelt 2000.
distributions of unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, and other social benefits as clientelism. Their scheme does not distinguish non-quid-pro-quo exchanges in which distribution is nevertheless biased – there is no category like “distributive politics,” as that term is used here. Nor do they distinguish different forms of clientelism. I have argued that phenomena like vote buying, the manipulation of public policy, and patronage have distinct dynamics and raise distinct normative red flags.

But the central difference between Kitschelt and Wilkinson’s map and my own is that theirs does not consider publicity or transparency of principles of distribution. I have argued that we are unable to draw an analytical line between programmatic and non-programmatic strategies without paying attention to whether, in the U.S. Supreme Court’s words, the benefits that voters receive are the product of “the normal processes of government” or “some private arrangement,” a question that forces us to pay attention to the communicative dimension distributive offers.

Another classifying principle that students of materialist strategies have used is by the kind of voter targeted, whether core supporters or swing voters and likely voters or likely abstainers. Hence Dunning and Stokes distinguish persuasion, mobilization, the persuasion of loyalists, and mobilization of opponents, while Gans-Morse and co-authors distinguish vote-buying, turnout-buying, double-persuasion, negative turnout buying, and rewarding loyalists. All of these strategies are best considered – in relation to Figure 1 – as distinct forms of non-programmatic, biased distribution with quid-pro-quo understandings between the machine and voters. Neither set of authors does a good job explaining how these strategies differ from “normal” public policy from which individuals benefit. Hence Gans-Morse and co-authors open their paper with the following:

During elections in many countries, parties distribute particularistic benefits to individuals. Political operatives frequently hand out not just cash, but also a

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53 Kitschelt and Wilkinson may mean that two of their criteria, “contingency of exchange” and “nature of goods offered to voters” must interact to define clientelism, so that programmatic distribution can entail private goods if there is no quid-pro-quo exchange involved. If so, their scheme would not lose any power to discern if it were to drop the dimension of “nature of goods exchanged”.

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wide range of goods and services such as bags of rice, chickens, whisky, clothing, soccer balls, Viagra, haircuts, and teeth cleaning.\textsuperscript{54}

As in the Dixit-Londregan quote cited at the outset, conceptualization is replaced by examples that seem self-evidently distinct from programmatic politics. But the reader is not sure why, more abstractly, they are different.

The scheme that I have proposed here seeks to answer just this question, among others. The value of any scheme should be judged by how well it captures strategies that we observe in the world, how effectively it steers us toward distinct causal dynamics shaping strategies that are in other ways similar, and in how well it identifies distinctions that, from the vantage point of normative democratic theory, matter.

\textsuperscript{54} Gans-Morse, 1; their list is from Schaffer 2006, 7. For their part, Dunning and Stokes write about \textit{clientelism} and \textit{clientelist parties} without defining those terms.
References


