

# The Phenomenon of Pork Barrel Politics

Money and Politics

# What is Politics?

- Plenty of various definitions
- What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'politics'?
- Many associated concepts

# What is Politics?

- Includes many practical and seemingly non-political actions
- Project of a new highway approved by national government
- A region discusses where to build a school
- Small village aims to improve the surroundings of its main road by planting a few trees

# Money and Politics

- Money is necessary for decision making in politics
- Decisions require not just an approval but also an implementation
- The question of flow of money
  - Where does it come from?
  - How much is needed?
  - Who benefits and who loses?
- Money shares some physical features of pure energy

# Importance of Money in Politics

- Where does political power come from?
- Imagine public money to be completely separated from politics
- Consequences?

# What Money Will We Talk About

- Public money and their distribution
- Legal money
- Money that political representatives have ‘at their disposal’
  - Not the mandatory expenditures of countries – wages of teachers, pensions, interests from debts the country has etc.
- Together – distribution of public money that might seem to have no problems until we find out more and get to details

# Pork Barrel Politics

- Distributive politics – distribution of money that concentrates benefits in specific geographic areas while its costs are spread through general taxation (Shepsle and Weingast 1981)
- Pork barrel politics – distribution of money affected by political and partisan interests
- Key points:
  - Concentrated benefits (only someone profits)
  - Spread costs (everybody contributes)
  - Politics in the game (distribution in accordance with political and partisan goals)

# Historical Origins





# Historical Origins

- 19<sup>th</sup> century in the USA (before the Civil War)
- Custom of slavers to give barrels of pork to their slaves during holidays
- The fights between slaves for food used later as an analogy for struggles of U.S. Congress members when trying to provide public money to their constituencies

# Game of Points

- Let's assume it is the beginning of April (after my lectures and position papers graded)
- I have 120 points in this course to distribute to you (60 people)
- Suggest various ways how I can distribute the points so that
  - The distribution can be considered just, and
  - We can defend the outcome of the distribution with rational arguments

# Possible Ways of Distribution

1. Two points to everybody (equality)
2. More points to those who attend our sessions (attendance)
3. More points to those who are more active (active attendance)
4. More points to those with less points from position paper (compensation)
5. More points to those with more points from position paper (motivation)
6. More points to 'older' students (rescue and risk aversion)

# Other Ways of Distribution

- Color of hair
  - More points given to those with brown hair over all the others
- Sympathies towards the lecturer
  - Questionnaire where you select how you like the lecturer on a 0-10 scale
  - After that the lecturer distributes more points to those who gave him more points
- Problems? Of what sort?

# Logic of Distribution

- Any distribution of public money inevitably leads to those who benefit and those who do not (or at least not to such extent)
- Conditions of a just distribution:
  - Ability to rationally defend the outcome of the distribution
  - The explanation of the distribution lies within the goal of the distribution
  - The result of distribution is not affected by relations between those who control the money and those who obtain it
- Pork barrel politics contradicts all three conditions

# One or More Pork Barrel Politics?

- Anthony Hoare (1992) on transport investments in New Zealand
- The character of pork barrel politics depends on local political conditions
- Main role of power relations and institutional setting
- Differs between two (three) types of pork barrel politics

# Individual Pork Barrel Politics

- Evolves when political parties are less powerful than individual political representatives (USA)
- Resources used as a way to introduce and pass legislation
- Rewards and compensations based on the actual situation
- Benefits spread beyond partisan lines

# Centralized Pork Barrel Politics

- Evolves in countries with powerful political parties and weaker individual representatives (Europe)
- Parties in government control the resources and use them to support their members on various territorial levels
- Benefits primarily given to members of governmental parties
- Two subtypes (Hoare 1992) – safe seat v. marginal



Type	Individual	Centralized
Conditions	Individual representatives > parties	Parties > individual representatives
Goal	Legislation, reelection	Reelection
Example	USA	Europe



# Legality and Legitimacy

- Legality – in accordance with legal rules
- Legitimacy – accepted as understandable, relevant, fair, rightful etc.
- For a smooth democratic governance legality and legitimacy should not stand against each other

# Examples

- Laws adopted in Nazi Germany (1933-45) against human rights
- Opposition activities in non-democratic regimes
- A law prescribing that elections are held once in 25 years
- Project of coal power plant in accordance with the legal rules
- 2021 US Capitol attack

# Is Pork Barrel Politics Legal?

- Usually without any doubt:
  - Based on existing norms
  - Follows its own formal rules
  - Realized by official governmental agencies
- No law defining features such as ‘political ally’, ‘political enemy’, ‘positive bias for one’s own party’ etc.
- Violation of legality is very seldom in pork barrel politics

# Is Pork Barrel Politics Legitimate?

- A million dollar question

# The 'New School' project

- Situation:
  - 20 towns in a region, each town has a primary school
  - Due to budget cuts the region has to close one of the schools and the people will definitely not like it
  - What factors should the region take into account?
- Options:
  - Amount of savings on wages, energies etc.
  - Distance the kids have to travel to other towns (impact on environment)
  - Amount of kids (families) affected by the change
  - Capacities of schools in adjacent towns
  - Cultural impact on the selected towns (any libraries in there?)
  - Is the mayor of the town our political ally or a political rival?

# Is Pork Barrel Politics Legitimate?

- A million dollar question
- Pork barrel politics relies on distribution of money based on reasons NOT connected to the supported goal
- Impact on moral issues – it creates an impression that using public resources for political ambitions is okay and acceptable
- Evans (2004): *'pork barreling, despite its much maligned status, gets things done'*
- Machiavellianism at its best

# Pork Barrel Politics and Electoral Corruption

- Pork barrel politics often labeled as ‘vote-buying mechanism’
- Electoral Corruption (Birch 2009):
  - Manipulation of rules
  - Manipulation of voting
  - Manipulation of voters
- Does pork barrel politics fall under such manipulation?



# Pork Barrel Politics and Electoral Corruption

- Corruption of voters:
  - Direct benefits to individual voters
  - Direct instructions how to vote
  - Control of behavior of voters
- Pork barrel politics:
  - Benefits provided to whole territories
  - No instructions how to vote and absence of control
- The aims might be the same but realization is different

# What About Corruption?

- Rothstein (2014) – *What is the opposite of corruption?*
  - Outcomes as well as the procedures are important
  - The essence of corruption is the denial of impartiality
- Pork barrel politics also stands on denial of impartiality
- Test of logical thinking – is pork barrel politics the same as corruption?