Bedfellow Politics: The Effect of Institutional Checks on Preferences and Policy

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Abstract

Political institutions define the allocation of decision-making authority among officeholders. Institutional position is empowering, but the preferences of each actor thus empowered also constrain what others can achieve. I argue that the combination of institutional prerogative and preference-imposed constraints gives policy makers incentives to adapt their priorities (and thus their revealed preferences) to both institutional structures and the preferences and priorities of other policy makers. Officeholders who must cooperate to make policy will invest resources and suffer losses, both to help counterparts they agree with to hold on to office and to make it more difficult to do so for counterparts with whom they do not agree. My argument rests on the assumptions that a) political actors have policy goals, but they can achieve their goals only if others in the policy process support them; and b) political actors compete for and retain power by working for the benefit of those who put them in office. When decision-making authority is split among several actors, decision makers are motivated not only to take each other’s preferences into account, but also to tailor proposals to help (or hinder) each other’s ability to retain office.

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“Misery acquaints a man with strange bed-fellows”
—Trinculo, The Tempest, Act 2, scene 2, lines 45-46

**Introduction**

Practitioners of politics, like sufferers in misery, cannot choose their partners. Voters (or other selectors) elect politicians to occupy institutionally defined positions, and it is voters, not politicians, who decide how to allocate control over different institutions. Institutions, for their part, define political organization by allocating authority among political actors. They affect politics in two ways. First, dispersion of authority affects government effectiveness—its ability to make clear, consistent, and timely decisions (Arrow 1951; McKelvey 1976; Weaver and Rockman 1993, 5-6). Second, in line with Charles Plott’s (1991, 905; Hinich and Munger 1997, 17) “fundamental equation” of politics, outcomes are a function of preferences and institutions. When a single party or legislative cartel (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Amorim Neto, Cox, and McCubbins 2003) controls all positions of authority, however, institutions are seen as irrelevant (see, for example, Lijphart 1984; Tsebelis and Money 1997; Tsebelis 2002).

I argue that institutions are never irrelevant. By dividing authority, they constrain policy makers from acting unilaterally. They also empower policy makers by giving them authority to make or refuse policy proposals. Where a single party controls various institutions, for example the party members in those institutions find themselves imbued with authority quite independent of whatever authority they have within the party hierarchy. Unless party members have identical preferences, an unlikely eventuality, they can use this authority to protect their interests (see, e.g., Heller 1997; Heller 2001b; see also, Lijphart 1999, 211).¹ Even with identical interests, as long as voters care about some policy different from the content of party labels, the need to attract support to retain control of multiple institutions requires more effort—at higher cost—

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¹ They might, for example, be able to move policy outcomes closer to their own ideal points—or impede others who would like to move policy farther away.
than for a single one. I seek in this paper to explore the policy implications of divided authority. The rules that define policy makers’ ability to influence outcomes give them incentives to adapt their priorities (and thus their revealed preferences) to both institutional structures and the preferences and priorities of other policy makers. Officeholders who must cooperate to make policy will invest resources and suffer losses, both to help counterparts they agree with to hold on to office and to make it more difficult to do so for counterparts with whom they do not agree.

My argument rests on two pillars. First, political actors have policy goals. Their ability to achieve those goals depends on their ability to convince those with whom they share power to support their proposals. This implies that policy makers prefer to share power with people of like mind. Second, political actors compete for and retain power by working for the benefit of those who put them in office. This implies that officeholders seek some policy goals in addition to and distinct from the goals nearest to their own hearts. Every officeholder’s ideal policy package, incorporating both constituency-imposed and personal preferences, thus is unique. Therefore, divided authority motivates those who share power to consider each other’s preferences, not only to determine what proposals can feasibly pass, but also to affect each other’s continued tenure in office.

In this paper I develop this argument formally, but with an eye to real-world validity. I begin in the next section with a review of institutional analyses of decision making. This review suggests that the prevailing, comparative-statics approach induces scholars to take both institutions and their occupants as given, which in turn constrains analysis. In the following

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A third possibility is that different offices might serve different purposes or constituencies (Jacobson 1991). For example, members of the US Congress from the same party and similar districts might agree on most issues, but when it comes to distributing resources each prefers as much as possible for her own constituents, even at the expense of her colleagues. This type of consideration would magnify the differences among parties, but it would not affect the logic of the argument I present below.
section, I build a model of bicameral decision making in which each chamber majority’s concern with future policy making leads it to adjust its own behavior (that is, expressed policy preferences) based on not only on its and its counterpart’s “raw” preferences, but also the possibility of affecting its counterparts preferences (e.g., by provoking a change in its identity). I follow the model with an examination of some empirical evidence and a computational exploration of the issue (drawn from Heller and Ryan 2000), along with a discussion of further implications. The final section concludes.

**Literature review: Joint Decision Making**

Typically, analysts examine Plott’s fundamental equation using one of three related classes of models: agenda models that focus on the ability of a policy proposer to achieve outcomes close to her ideal; veto models that highlight veto authority allow actors to leverage the threat of a veto into influence; and bargaining models that elucidate how competing agenda setters or veto players agree on policy. All can be illustrated with a simple array of players and preferences in a unidimensional policy space (such as a left-right continuum), similar to the agenda-model example depicted in Figure 1, where SQ, A, and V are, respectively, the status quo policy and the ideal policy points of an agenda setter and a veto player. The point labeled sq* is constructed so that the veto player is indifferent between it and the status quo. The agenda setter and the veto player are assumed to have single-peaked, Euclidean preferences (that is, each likes alternatives less the farther they are from his or her ideal point). It is common also to assume that a player who is indifferent between a proposal and the status quo will accept the proposal.

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3 That is, preferences untinged by strategic or practical considerations.
4 In the example given in the figure, the agenda setter is considerably to the right of the veto player.
5 This last assumption is one of any number of possible rules for breaking ties.
**Agenda models:** The classic agenda model is Romer and Rosenthal’s “setter model,” a one-shot game in which the agenda setter proposes a policy to the veto player, who accepts or rejects it (Romer and Rosenthal 1978; Rosenthal 1990; for more complex models that build on the setter model, see, e.g., Heller 2001a; Rasch 1995; 2000; Rohde 1991; Weingast 1992). If the veto player rejects the proposal, the status-quo policy obtains. In the example illustrated in Figure 1, the agenda setter will propose new policy at sq*, which the veto player accepts. Any other proposal would be worse for the agenda setter: the veto player would reject a proposal to the right of sq* or to the left of SQ, leaving policy at SQ; and the veto player would accept any proposal in the shaded area, as he prefers anything between SQ and sq* to SQ. Any proposal other than sq* results in policy that the agenda setter likes less than what she could achieve by proposing sq*.

**Veto models:** Veto models draw attention to the incentives and behavior of veto players. Strategic veto players can force agenda setters to adjust their proposals in the agenda setter’s favor (Cameron 2000); in a different context, competing veto players have to adjust what they consider acceptable policy in order to avoid sequences of vetoes that leaves the status quo unchallenged (Cox and McCubbins 1991; Heller 1997). Finally, increasing the number of veto players decreases the likelihood that any new policy will pass and, for Tsebelis (2002), ensures that policy is relatively centrist.

**Bargaining models:** Bargaining models have considerably less structure than setter and
veto models. It is safe to assume that bargained outcomes lie between players’ ideal points, but exactly where depends fundamentally on how impatient the players are to reach some agreement (Osborne and Rubinstein 1990), on what happens if players cannot reach agreement through the normal bargaining process (Tsebelis and Money 1997), or whether players have the option of choosing not to bargain at all (cf. Binmore 1985).

In these models, rules affect players’ behavior only instrumentally. They make it more difficult to take decisions (Tsebelis 2000; 2002), and decisions that are taken are likely to be more costly (Cox and McKelvey 1984; Cox and Tutt 1984). This is problematic because it constrains analysis. Given institutions that force politicians to share power, it makes sense that politicians would prefer to have colleagues with whom they agree. If policy outcomes affect who retains, who wins, and who loses office, then politicians should incorporate this effect into their calculations of what kinds of policies to support or at least tolerate.

Government structures that break up authority serve the purpose that James Madison had in mind when he suggested that “ambition must be made to counteract ambition” in order to “oblige [the government] to control itself” (Federalist 51). The problem with pitting ambition against ambition is that people prefer not to see their ambitions thwarted. The more those who share authority agree on policy goals, the better they are able to achieve what they desire (Heller 2001b; Heller and Ryan 2000). This observation suggests that institutional structures can provide incentives for key players to consider and even internalize each other’s preferences. In order to explore this notion and its implications, I develop in the next section a theoretical model geared toward bicameral parliamentary systems and ask how legislative outcomes under divided control

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6 The logic I will develop in this project should apply to corporate as well as to political governance. The principal-agent literature from which it in part stems originated in Industrial Organization economics.
of the legislature (that is, a different majority in control of each chamber) differ from outcomes under unified control.

**Model: Policy and Partnership**

In order to get at the question of how sharing decision-making authority affects actors’ preferences, I first need to establish how and to what end decisions are made. To this end, I begin with the simplest possible institutional structure for joint decision making: two offices, each with the power to veto the other’s decisions. The occupants of both offices must jointly decide how to allocate resources and set policy: policy decisions determine actors’ payoffs, and policy and resource-allocations decisions together determine their tenure in office.

In this setup, officeholders might care about one or a combination of two things: policy outcomes or retaining office. In principle, the officeholders could be individual politicians. I look at political parties rather than individual officeholders, however, for several reasons. First, it is difficult in practical terms to conceive of individuals dispassionately sacrificing their own tenure in office for the sake of policy. Parties can more easily do this, and since I want to focus on officeholders’ policy preferences it makes more sense to focus on parties. Second, and related, my emphasis on policy preferences means that I want to sidestep questions of bribery or other side payments, and it ought in principle to be more difficult to buy off a party than an individual. And third, a party can much more easily occupy two offices—or legislative chambers—than can an individual. Concentrating on parties rather than individuals makes it easier ascribe to actors any combination of office and policy motivations (cf. Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999).

The political structure closest to my generic requirements is a bicameral parliament. The

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7 Parties and individuals alike care about office, policy, and votes (Fenno 1973; Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1990). Parties, however, can sacrifice individuals in the interests of more desirable policy outcomes or better prospects for participation in government. For an individual to make such a sacrifice, by contrast, would be self-defeating (cf., Mayhew 1974).
“offices”—veto gates, basically—are the legislative chambers, and the decision makers are the chamber majorities. The game in question, then, is legislative policy making in a bicameral system, where the majority parties or coalitions in each chamber jointly make ideological policy and distribute pork (Heller 2001b), each with an eye to achieving policy outcomes as close as possible to its own ideal policy. Pork is essentially distributive, reelection-oriented spending that helps garner votes in the next election for any incumbent that can successfully claim credit for it. The electoral benefits of pork accrue to the incumbent legislative majorities, and the majority in each of the two legislative chambers benefits separately. Ideological policy, by contrast, is redistributive legislation that attracts some voters and repels others. A party that controls both chambers can set policy anywhere it wants and claim full credit for any and all pork; a party that controls only one chamber must negotiate ideological as well as pork policy with its counterpart majority in the other chamber and also share credit with its counterpart for all pork. A party that is not in the majority in either chamber can neither influence policy nor claim credit for any pork.

Parties seek policy outcomes for their own purposes. They can retain policy-making influence only by winning elections. Parties therefore must pay attention to voters, who can care solely about policy, solely about pork, or about a combination of both. Pork comes with a caveat, however: it involves spending that requires either increased taxes or budget deficits, neither of which voters like. As in many political games, what voters want, drives policy makers’ behavior.

**Sequence and assumptions**

Policy results from a series of decisions, with new decisions building on or reacting to previous ones. Legislatures, parties, and ideologies do not emerge spontaneously, so in a sense there is no clear starting point for analyzing the interplay among voters’ preferences, policy makers’ preferences, and the exigencies of reelection. There is a chicken-and-egg question here:
if voters choose policy makers, but do so at least in part on the basis of incumbents’ performance in office (Austen-Smith and Banks 1988; Fiorina 1981; Popkin et al. 1976), and if policy makers’ performance in office is at least in part constrained or otherwise shaped by expectations of voters’ reactions to it, where does analysis begin? We sidestep this issue by setting voter preferences and initial incumbent policy makers exogenously—that is, Nature makes the first move (or the first two moves: see Figure 2).

As long as parties care somewhat about the future, much of what they do will be driven by their expectations about voters. After all, they can hope to influence policy outcomes only if they control at least one legislative chamber. We assume that parties are willing to use distributive policy to improve their electoral prospects, but at the end of the day they care only about ideological policy.

**Policy Goals**

The reasons that voters go to the polls and vote for one party over any alternative are many and as yet only imperfectly understood. I care about voter choice here only to the extent that the anticipation of it affects the strategies of legislative parties, party leaders, and individual legislators, however, so I focus only on things that legislators can change—specifically, parties’ public goals, which can be different from parties’ ideal policies. I assume throughout that voters (and other parties) know all parties’ ideal policy points and learn parties’ public goals through

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**Figure 2: Policy makers and policy making**

1. Nature sets voter preferences for ideology & pork
2. Nature chooses chamber majorities
3. Chambers jointly set ideological & pork policy
4. Election: voters choose new chamber majorities
5. Chambers jointly set ideological & pork policy

Party payoffs: ideological policy plus cont. value
campaigns and party performance in office.

The results of legislative policy making can take two forms, as discussed above. Policy can be either distributive or redistributive. Pork policies are classically distributive, with focused benefits and costs so diffuse that the marginal cost to taxpayers of any one such policy is essentially nil. Taken together, however, pork policies benefit all or most voters, albeit at a heavy cost to taxpayers (**cites). Ideological policy, by contrast, is redistributive: it reflects policy makers’ views of how society and the economy should be structured. Except where Pareto-improving changes are possible, any change in policy—whether to protect the status quo or to deviate from it—hurts some people, either by taking away resources\(^8\) that they already have or by denying them resources that they would otherwise gain.

**Voter preferences**

Given these straightforward observations about policy, it is reasonable to divide voters into haves and have-nots with respect to ideological policy. In ideological-policy terms, each voter prefers the party whose ideology best serves his or her interests. Pork, on the other hand, is nonpartisan: its benefits are available to all incumbents, though the degree to which a voter appreciates it depends on the mix of ideological and pork policies that s/he prefers.

The reasons that voters prefer one party over another probably are as varied as the voters themselves. From the parties’ perspective, voter preferences can usefully be reduced to preferences over ideological policy and pork. For ideological preferences, let the ideological policy outcome be \(x \in [0,1]\) and voter \(v\)'s perception of parties’ ability to influence that outcome be \(\gamma_v(x) \in (0,1)\), which peaks when \(x\) is at the ideal point of one of the two parties that anchor the policy space (\(x_i\) or \(x_j\), as illustrated in Figure 3). The intuition here is that the more clearly are

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\(^8\) I use the term “resources” broadly here to indicate anything from wealth to power to privilege, or any combination thereof.
outcomes identified with specific party ideologies, the more likely are voters to see policy making as ideology driven. For a table of notation, see Appendix.

For pork preferences, let the pork policy outcome be a spending level $b$ that is enjoyed equally by all voters. Majorities share credit for pork (and blame for any increases in spending) to the extent that they share policy-making authority. For party $i$ in chamber $l$, Voter $v$’s perception of $i$’s willingness and ability (that is, efficacy) to deliver pork-policy benefits is $\phi_i(b_{il}) \in (0,1)$, which increases with $b_{il}$, where $b_{il}$ is the amount of pork attributable to party $i$, as illustrated in Figure 4. In essence, $b_{il}$ is the amount of pork $i$ spends to buy votes to retain control over chamber $l$. I constrain both $\phi_i(b_{il})$ and $\gamma_v(x)$ to be greater than zero and less than unity, in recognition of the mysteries of individual voting decisions, and $0 < \gamma_v(x) + \phi_i(b_{il}) < 1$. This means that a party could bend over backwards to give voters exactly what they want for all types of policy, yet still run a risk of doing poorly at the polls.

In terms of policy-related concerns that legislatures can affect, voters care about ideological policy outcomes and pork. Quite simply, $v$ likes party $i$ more the closer her ideal

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Figure 3: Voter perception of party influence on ideological policy

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9 These figures are intended to be suggestive only.
point is to that of the party and she likes outcomes more the closer they are to her ideal point. Her ideology-based utility for party $i$ is a function of these factors, weighted by her perception of $i$’s ability to influence ideological policy outcomes. At the same time, it seems reasonable as well to assume that voters are in some degree sensitive to the level of government spending, inasmuch as higher spending carries with it at least the threat of higher taxes. That is, people prefer not to see their taxes increase. The voter’s pork-based utility for $i$ in chamber $l$ is a function of how much pork $i$ in $l$ can claim credit for and how strongly $v$ feels about increases in spending.\footnote{I am assuming here that net ideological-policy expenditure is either constant or negligible. This assumption seems reasonable, particularly if ideological and redistributive policy are the same.}

Thus, if each voter $v$ prioritizes her desire for different kinds of policy by attaching a weight $\omega_v \in [0,1]$ to ideological policy, and $\theta_v(b_{il})$ is a function that measures her dislike of government spending\footnote{Alternatively, $\theta_v(b_{il})$ might be a combined statistic measuring $v$’s discount rate and her ability to link spending and taxes. In any case, $\theta_v(b_{il})$ increases at an increasing rate with $b$—that is, both $\frac{\partial \theta_v(b_{il})}{\partial b} > 0$ and $\theta_v''(b_{il}) > 0$.} (in practical terms, the cost that incumbent $i$ in chamber $l$ pays for claiming credit for extra spending) the part of $v$’s utility for party $i$ that $i$ can control is

$$u_v(i) = \omega_v \frac{1}{\gamma_v(x)} \left( -\|x_v - x\| + \|x_v - x_i\| \right) + (1 - \omega_v) \phi_v(b_{il}) b_{il} - \theta_v(b_{il}),$$

where $\| \|$ is the Euclidean norm.\footnote{Technically, $\gamma_v(x)$ is a combination for $v$’s utility for party $i$ generally and for party $i$ in chamber $l$.} (For exposition, I henceforth express $\|x_v - x\|$ as $d_v(x)$.)\footnote{I use the inverse of $\gamma_v(x)$ because we specify negative quadratic utilities for policy distance, so that higher utility is closer to zero.}

Utility for a party alone does not define a voter’s choice, however. In order to choose, the voter has to compare her utilities for different parties. It makes sense to assume that the voter is more likely to vote for the party she likes best. Note that “more likely” is not a guarantee—a
voter who does not value ideological policy or pork (or who values policy issues not touched by political parties) might choose not to vote or to vote on some basis distinct from policy outcomes. A voter also might vote in line with nonpolicy concerns or not at all if she perceives little difference in her utility for different parties. Because the decisions of parties (or, rather, the legislators who make up parties) depend on voters’ choices, it is worthwhile briefly to examine those choices.

**Voter decisions**

In order to cast a ballot, a voter must in essence rank parties in order of preference. In our formulation, voter $v$ is most likely to vote for party $i$ if $u_v(i) > u_v(j), \forall j \neq i.^{14}$ The greater the inequality—the more she likes party $i$ or the more she dislikes party $j$—the more likely she is to vote. Taking $i$ as the party $v$ likes best on policy grounds, the probability that $v$ votes for party $i$ is a function $f_v^i(u_v(i), u_v(j))$ that is increasing in $u_v(i)$, decreasing in $u_v(j)$, and increasing in the difference between the two. If $u_v(i)$ or $u_v(i) - u_v(j)$ is sufficiently small, $v$ might choose not to vote.

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$^{14}$ I therefore simplify away from electoral systems that allow voters to vote for more than one candidate, such as Ireland’s single transferable vote or Australia’s alternative vote.
vote at all. In what follows, in the interests of simplicity I consider only two parties, $i$ and $j$. This makes sense for two reasons: first, with only one vote to cast $v$ has to narrow her choice down to the top contenders; and second, even in a multiparty legislature the policy making process ultimately comes down to two opposing blocs of votes, which for present purposes I equate with parties (cf. Saari and Schwedler 1994).  

**Party decisions**

Parties cannot consistently or predictably affect any element of voter objective functions other than $x$ and $b$. In any legislature with no majority party, a party’s ability to choose $x$ and $b$ likely is constrained by the need to compromise with other parties on policy in order to form a majority. In a bicameral legislature, parties or majority blocs might need to compromise across chambers as well, unless the preferences of the chamber majorities are identical.  

The problem with compromise is that no party or majority gets policy that it wants, and all parties share credit for whatever distributive benefits they pass. In the first instance, compromise on ideological policy means that voters see parties as relatively unable to influence redistributive outcomes and so effectively assign less weight to ideology in pondering their next vote choice (because $\gamma_v(x)$ is lower for all $v$ than it would be if $x$ were closer to some party ideal point). In the latter instance, sharing credit for distributive benefits means that pork gives neither incumbent majority an electoral advantage over the other.

If voters were not in the picture, each party would do all that it could to bring policy outcomes closer to its own ideal point. That is, for any party $i$, preferences over policy outcomes

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15 I refer interchangeably to “parties” and “majorities” throughout this paper. There are of course important differences between single-party and other kinds of majorities, but to delve into these differences is beyond the scope of this paper.

16 Identical preferences for chamber majorities are unlikely. Even if majorities share labels, there is a good chance that chamber preferences could differ; see Heller 1997.
(without taking into account strategic considerations such as voter reactions to outcomes) are purely spatial. I thus characterize party $i$’s utility for policy outcome $x$ as $u_i(x) = -d_i(x)$; $i$’s utility for distributive policy, by contrast, is purely instrumental, as parties see pork as useful only to the extent that it helps get or keep them in office, where they have a better chance to influence redistributive-policy outcomes. Taking both together and assuming fairly high party discount factors, $i$ seeks to set $x$ and $b$ jointly to maximize $-d_i(x)$, $V_i = \{v : u_v(i) > u_v(j), j \neq i\}$, and $u_v(i) - u_v(j)$, while minimizing $V_j$. I focus first on the question of attracting voters.

Not all parties seek to attract the same voters. For every pair of parties $\{i, j\}$, there is a representative voter $v$—analogous to the median voter in a two-party system, albeit not necessarily at the median between $i$ and $j$—whose support is essential. Parties compete for $v$’s favor and, by extension, that of voters close to $v$, so that the more $v$ likes a party the better are its electoral prospects. In other words, maximizing $u_v(i)$ for this representative voter is tantamount to maximizing $V_i$, and similarly for minimizing $V_j$. If I were explicitly to define $\gamma_v(x)$ and $\phi_v(x)$, I could find optimal values for $x$ and $b_i$; in the interests of generality, however, I do not define these functions beyond describing their general shapes (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

To find the ideological outcome $x'$ most favorable for party $i$’s electoral hopes, $x' = \arg \max_x u_v(i)$, we set the derivative of $u_v(i)$ with respect to $x$ equal to zero, so that

$$\frac{\partial u_v(i)}{\partial x} = -\frac{\omega_v d'_v(x)}{\gamma_v(x)} - \frac{\omega_v (-\|x_v - x_i\| - d_v(x)) \gamma'_v(x)}{\gamma_v(x)^2} = 0.$$  

Because I do not define a function for $\gamma_v(x)$ beyond specifying its maxima (at $x_i$ and $x_j$) and (at least local) minimum (at $x_m = x_i + \frac{1}{2}(x_j - x_i)$), I cannot solve explicitly for $x'$. I can instead
identify a range of values of \( x \) that includes \( x' \) for each of the four basic configurations of party and representative-voter ideal points (maintaining the assumption that \( x_i < x_j \) and again ignoring cases where \( x_v = x_i, x_v = x_j \), or \( x_v = x_m \). Since the relative positions of \( x_i, x_m, \) and \( x_j \) do not change, the four configurations depend on \( x_v \). If \( x_v \) is centrist relative to party ideal points, then either \( x_i < x_v < x_m < x_j \) or \( x_i < x_m < x_v < x_j \). For \( x_v \) more extreme, either \( x_v < x_i \) or \( x_v > x_j \).

In the interests of simplifying the search for an optimal \( x \), two factors are worth highlighting. First, \( x' \) can only be in a range where \( \gamma'_v(x) \) and \( d'_v(x) \) have the same sign. Second, \( u_v(i) \) has local maxima, of which the global maximum is the one closest to \( x_v \), all else constant. Given these factors and the fact that a) \( \gamma'_v(x) > 0 \) only if \( x < x_i \) or \( x_m < x < x_j \) and b) \( d'_v(x) > 0 \) only if \( x > x_v \) it is simple matter of deduction to identify where \( x' \) should lie. The second column of Table 1 shows the possible range of \( x' \) for the possible configurations of ideal points (shown in the first column of the table).

The first two rows of Table 1 confirm the common-sense intuition that \( v \)'s utility for party \( i \) should be highest when policy outcomes are near both voter and party ideal points. When \( v \) is closer to party \( i \) than party \( j \), party \( i \) maximizes its electoral prospects—that is, both the number of voters who prefer \( i \) to \( j \) and the likelihood that they will bother to vote—by making policy somewhere in the range between \( x_j \) and \( x_v \). The third and fourth rows, by contrast, suggest that for \( v \) closer to party \( j \), party \( i \)'s electoral prospects are best when outcomes are relatively close to \( j \)'s ideal point. This seemingly counterintuitive claim arises from two assumptions: First, that the probability of voting for one party over another can approach but never reach unity. And second, as illustrated in Figure 4, that outcomes far from any party’s ideal point make parties look ineffective with regard to ideological policy making. If parties can get
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative positions of ideal points</th>
<th>Range for $x'$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$x_v &lt; x_i &lt; x_m &lt; x_j$</td>
<td>$x' \in (x_v, x_i)$</td>
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<tr>
<td>$x_i &lt; x_v &lt; x_m &lt; x_j$</td>
<td>$x' \in (x_v, x_i)$</td>
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<td>$x_i &lt; x_m &lt; x_v &lt; x_j$</td>
<td>$x' \in (x_v, x_i)$</td>
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<tr>
<td>$x_i &lt; x_m &lt; x_j &lt; x_v$</td>
<td>$x' \in (x_v, x_i)$</td>
</tr>
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</table>

voters to the polls only by manipulating policy outcomes, if parties value votes (see Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999), then bad outcomes that make voters appreciate parties might be better than less noxious outcomes that lead voters to believe that parties serve no purpose.

I do not believe that parties care about votes, except instrumentally. At the end of the day parties care only about policy, and a party cares about votes only inasmuch as votes help it to move policy outcomes closer its ideal. Outcomes like those described in rows three and four of Table 1 contribute to increased voting on the basis of ideological policy outcomes, but party $j$ benefits more than party $i$, likely making party $i$ worse off at least through the next legislature.

Parties might care only about ideological policy, but voters care about pork policy as well. Party $i$ might find it more useful to try to keep ideological policy as far as possible from $x_j$, even if that reduces the ideological vote, focusing instead on attracting votes through liberal applications of distributive policy. The extent to which a party might want to use distributive policy in this way depends on the credit the party can claim as well as the blame it has to shoulder. Setting

$$\frac{\partial u_i(i)}{\partial b_{il}} = (1 - \omega_i)(\phi_i(b_{il}) + b\phi'_i(b_{il})) - \theta'_i(b_{il}) = 0,$$  

it is clear that pork is most useful for attracting votes when $1 - \omega_i$ is relatively high and only as long as spending is not so high that new spending engenders more hostility than support (that is,
What proportion of overall distributive spending $b_i$ is depends on how voters link distributive policies to parties. It clearly makes little sense to credit (or blame) non-incumbent parties for distributive outcomes, but it is less clear what voters should think if there is more than one incumbent party (i.e., if different majorities control the chambers of a bicameral legislature): on one hand, voters could give each majority equal credit for pork; on the other hand, voters could relate distributive outcomes to redistributive ones, assigning greater responsibility to whichever party seems to benefit most from ideological policy.\textsuperscript{17} Clearly, there exists some $b_i^*$ at the point where the marginal benefit to $i$ of additional spending equals the marginal cost. The important point is that this optimal level of pork spending accrues to party $i$ as an incumbent in chamber $l$ only—and, indeed, all incumbent parties share the benefits and costs of pork.

Thus far, I have identified what a majority needs in order for its members to do well at the polls. How this translates into actual policy outcomes depends in part on reversionary ideological policy and in part on how closely chamber majorities agree on ideological policy. For the reversion—that is, the policy that obtains if the majorities controlling the different chambers cannot agree\textsuperscript{18}—there are basically two possibilities: either majorities split their policy differences, so that ideological policy reverts to the midpoint between majority ideal points; or the status quo ante remains in place. The degree of chamber ideological-policy agreement can in principle vary infinitely, with $i$ controlling both chambers at one extreme, $j$ controlling both

\textsuperscript{17} The possible ways that voters might assign credit are myriad. I simply note here that voters assign credit (and blame) somehow. Whatever the method, the effect on parties’ reelection prospects is either proportional across parties—hence inconsequential in terms of election outcomes—or better for one party than the other. If the former, then there is no benefit from spending; if the latter, then the party that benefits less would have good reason to refuse to approve new spending.

\textsuperscript{18} I assume that distributive-policy reversionary spending is nil.
chambers at the other extreme, \( i \) or \( j \) anchoring a coalition whose ideal point could be different from that of any of its component members, or some party \( h \) different from both \( i \) and \( j \) controlling at least one chamber; to begin, I look only at cases where no party but \( i \) or \( j \) can control one or both chambers alone, and \( i \) and \( j \) never form coalitions.

In order to maximize turnout in its own favor, party \( i \) wants to set policy at \((x^i, b^*\rangle\), where \( b^* \) is the total amount of pork spending if \( b_{it} = b_{jt}^* \). Turnout is only useful, however; to help \( i \) maximize its long-term utility from policy outcomes. Given that \( f^i_v(u, x, u, j) \) is the probability that the representative voter votes for \( i \), party \( i \)'s objective function is to find a policy \( x^*_i \) and pork spending \( b^*_i \) such that

\[
x^*_i, b^*_i = \arg \max_{x, b} \left[ -d_i(x^*_i) - \frac{\delta}{1-\delta} \left[ f^i_v(u, x, u, j) + (1 - f^j_v(u, x, u, j)) \right] d_i(x^*_j) \right],
\]

where \( \frac{\partial f^i_v}{\partial u, (i)} > 0 \) and \( \frac{\partial f^j_v}{\partial (u, (i) - u, (j))} > 0 \). Party \( j \) also wants to maximize its own version of Equation 4. If each party controls one legislative chamber, however, \( i \) and \( j \) have to agree in order to make policy. The problem is that their interests conflict.

**Policy making under divided control**

Given divided control of a bicameral legislature and party ideal points relatively distant from each other, it is hard to imagine a situation where majorities could agree on ideological policy legislation. For \( \delta \) small, parties’ utilities derive essentially from the distance from their ideal points to the policy outcome, so absent the possibility of Pareto-improving policies no change would be supported by both parties. If \( \delta \) is sufficiently large that future policy making figures heavily in party calculations, by contrast, then outcomes will depend in large part on
As can be seen in Table 1, keeping in mind that $u_i(i)$ and $u_j(j)$ are symmetrical, both parties do better in voters’ eyes if policy ends up both close to $x_v$ and close enough to some party’s ideal point that parties appear important for making policy—between, in other words, $v$’s ideal point and that of the party closest to it. Indeed, $x' = x'$. The real question is what happens to $u_v(i) - u_v(j)$: if it increases with $u_v(i)$, then party $j$ will oppose any policy change that increases $u_v(i)$; if it decreases with $u_v(i)$, i.e., because \( \frac{\partial f^v_i}{\partial u_v(i)} < \frac{\partial f^v_j}{\partial u_v(j)} \), then party $i$ will oppose policy that increases $u_v(i)$ (because in the process it improves $j$’s electoral prospects). Unless $u_v(i) - u_v(j)$ is constant, any policy change will improve the lot of one party at the expense of another, and the losing party will not agree to change policy. This logic holds whatever the reversion, as long as different parties control each legislative chamber and parties do not discount future policy outcomes very much.

What of non-ideological policy? If parties can increase their electoral prospects by legislative distributive policy, would they not do so? The answer, given divided control over a bicameral legislature and only two parties, is no. Chamber majorities share equally in the electoral benefits of distributive policy, so for any change pork spending \( \frac{\partial u_v(i)}{\partial b} = \frac{\partial u_v(j)}{\partial b} \), and $u_v(i) - u_v(j)$ does not change, all else constant. Because parties do not care about pork spending except for its effect on outcomes, they have no reason to legislate any distributive policy at all if they have to share credit for (and hence receive no net benefit from) it. If they care at all about the cost, then they have even more reason not to legislate it.
Policy making under unified control

The situation is different if party $i$ controls both legislative chambers.\textsuperscript{19} For $\delta$ small, $i$ will simply set $x = x_i$. As $\delta$ increases and future policy outcomes figure more heavily in $i$'s utility, $i$ will move outcomes toward $x_i^*$ as long as $x_v$ is closer to $x_i$ than to $x_j$. In the unlikely event that $i$ were to control both legislative chambers even with $x_v$ closer to $x_j$, on the other hand, putting $x$ close to $x_v$ also means putting it close to $x_j$, which increases $u_r(j)$ and decreases $u_r(i) - u_r(j)$, hence reducing the probability that the representative voter will back $i$ in the next election. Instead of such self-defeating cultivation of voter favor, $i$ is better off putting $x$ at its own ideal point, thus maximizing $\gamma_i(x)$ and minimizing the impact of the difference in distances from $v$'s ideal point to the party ideal points.\textsuperscript{20}

In maximizing $\gamma_i(x)$ by setting $x = x_i$ when $d_r(i) > d_r(j)$, party $i$ realizes a short-term benefit. This makes perfect sense, given that its chances of remaining in power to make and benefit from policy after the next election are fairly small, ceteris paribus. In essence, $i$ heavily discounts future ideological policy.\textsuperscript{21} In contrast to the situation where different majorities share power as well as credit for pork, however, $i$ can increase its electoral prospects by setting $b = \sum b_{il}^*$. Credit for distributive policy accrues solely to incumbents, so it is in the majority’s interest to increase pork spending to the point where the marginal benefit (voter favor earned) equals the marginal cost (voter hostility due to increased spending). The need to buy two votes

\textsuperscript{19} The argument holds also if party $j$ controls both chambers.

\textsuperscript{20} Recall from Equation 1 that the ideological component of $u_r(i)$ is driven by $-\frac{d_r(x)+d_r(x_i)}{\gamma_i(x)}$. Maximizing $\gamma_i(x)$ thus minimizes the effect of $u_r(i) - u_r(j)$.

\textsuperscript{21} Additionally, this is consistent with the not-unreasonable assumption that policy close to one party’s ideal boosts support for the other party by motivating its supporters to seek to overturn current policy.
per voter in a bicameral system means that spending will be twice as high as in a unicameral legislature. In the context of our maintained hypothesis that the probability of winning (or losing) an election is always less than unity, a unified majority always has an incentive to spend as much as possible as long as voters care even a little bit about pork (i.e., as long as $\omega$ is less than one).

The logic of policy and pork under unified control of a bicameral legislature should of course hold no matter where the minority’s ideal point is. It is not obvious that the logic should be the same under divided control, however. What happens as party ideal points move closer together and parties in effect begin to look more alike?

**Narrowing the policy space: two parties**

When parties are far apart ideologically, each has a lot to lose if the other takes control of policy making. For party ideal points relatively close together, in contrast, both $d_i(j)$ and $d_i(i) - d_i(j)$ are close to zero. In formal terms, since $\gamma_i(x)$ is defined relative to $x_i$ and $x_j$, voter and party calculations do not change as long as $x_i \neq x_j$; in practical terms, however, the difference between party reelection probabilities is small for any $x$. The difference between the policies that each party would put in place is small as well. Under such circumstances, and if $\omega < 1$, each party might be willing to increase pork spending, thereby increasing the possibility that both incumbent majorities would keep control of their respective chambers, rather than run the risk of losing control entirely.

On one hand, the usefulness of increasing pork spending is at first glance not obvious, as the net expected benefit to each party is zero. However, inasmuch as pork spending increases the probability that voters will reelect incumbents—and, when different majorities control different legislative chambers, split their tickets—increased pork spending at least reduces parties’
uncertainty about the future. The value of pork for incumbents increases dramatically, moreover, when majorities face or could face challenges from third parties outside the $[x_i, x_j]$ range.

**Narrowing the policy space: multiple parties**

Consider a third party $h$, $x_h \notin [x_i, x_j]$. As long as $i$ and $j$ ideal points are relatively far apart, which in turn makes it more likely that $x_v \in [x_i, x_j]$, the best that $h$ can do in elections, generally speaking, is to take votes away from $i$ or $j$, whichever is closest to $h$. This has the unfortunate effect of increasing the likelihood that the other will do well. The end result is that $h$ does not fare well at the polls nor in terms of policy outcomes. In anticipation of such a fate, $h$ has less incentive to challenge $i$ or $j$ in the first place. When $i$ and $j$ are close together (and $v$’s ideal point consequently is less likely to be between the party ideal points), by contrast, voters have a hard time distinguishing between the two, and $h$ offers a real alternative.

If their ideal points are close together, majorities in a divided legislature have little to lose if one or the other wins control of both chambers. When $h$ enters the scene, the situation changes. Faced with the possibility, even if remote, that $h$ could take control of the legislature, the incumbent majorities might stand to lose a great deal. As long as $d_i(j)$ is less than both $d_i(h)$ and $d_j(h)$, both parties probably are better off with an outcome between their ideal points than they would be with whatever outcome $h$ would produce. In order to shut $h$ out of majority status in either or both chambers, therefore, it is in both $i$ and $j$’s interests to increase pork spending.

Adapting Equation 4 and taking $x_{ij} \in [x_i, x_j]$ as the outcome when $i$ and $j$ are close together, $i$ wants to maximize

$$-d_i(x_{ij}) = \frac{\delta}{1 - \delta} \left[ f'_v(u_v(i), u_v(j)) d_i(x_{ij}) + \left( 1 - f'_v(u_v(i), u_v(j)) \right) d_i(x^*_h) \right].$$

The way to do this, at least for $d_i(x_{ij}) \ll d_i(x^*_h)$, is to do what it takes to make $\left( 1 - f'_v[u_v(i), u_v(j)] \right)$ as small

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22 Party $j$ wants to do the same, albeit with subscripts duly changed.
as possible. The best way to do so, given the minimal effect of changing $x$ when $i$ and $j$ are close together, is to increase pork spending. The result is that incumbents are highly likely to get reelected, but the majorities in each chamber are better off sharing power than they would be if one or both were to lose power to a third party.

**Hypotheses**

The foregoing analysis straightforwardly yields three hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: When chamber majorities in a bicameral legislature are far apart in ideological-policy terms, reversionary distributive and redistributive policy should obtain.

The intuition here is based on two assumptions: majorities care only about ideological policy; and legislation affects incumbent majorities’ prospects for retaining power. First, the nature of redistributive policy makes it unlikely that there can be a compromise policy that makes both majorities better off than the reversion, so they cannot agree to pass something other than the reversion. Second, each majority would be better off for future policy making if it could replace the other in the chamber it controls. To that end, neither party wants to do anything that would help the other hold on to its majority, much less displace its counterpart. Because the effect of pork spending is to help incumbents hold on to office, neither majority has an incentive to allow the other to claim credit for any pork. Consequently, distributive policy also ends up at its reversion.

Hypothesis 2: When the same majority controls both chambers in a bicameral legislature, spending on distributive policy will be high and redistributive policy will be close to the majority’s ideal.

Pork policy boosts incumbents’ electoral prospects. When a single majority controls both legislative chambers and hence can claim all credit for distributive policy, it has no incentive to skimp on spending as long as there is support to be won. It spends, we
reiterate, not because it particularly likes pork, but rather because pork spending increases its chances of setting ideological-policy outcomes close to its ideal. How close to that ideal depends on the extent to which the majority discounts future policy.\textsuperscript{23} The important point is that at the end of the day a majority that controls both legislative chambers can put outcomes wherever it wants to maximize its own utility.

Hypothesis 3: When different but relatively ideologically compatible majorities control each legislative chamber of a bicameral legislature, ideological policy likely will be a compromise between the chambers, and pork spending will be high.

The closer together are chamber-majority ideal points, the more satisfied are both majorities likely to be with policy outcomes that they produce jointly. Each majority stands to gain relatively little from gaining control over both chambers and so being able to make policy on its own—and, concomitantly, each stands to lose relatively little if the other gains control over both chambers. It should be relatively easy for majorities to reduce their uncertainty under such circumstances, in essence by agreeing to ensure to the extent possible the divided-legislature status quo.

Strictly speaking, the conclusion that ideological policy should be some sort of compromise and pork spending should be high when chamber majorities are close together is outside the two-party formal model set out above. Expanding the model to include the possibility of multiple parties, however, both clarifies the logic of policy making designed to maintain even rival incumbents in power and comes closer to reflecting what probably happens in the real world: when established parties fail to

\textsuperscript{23} It also could depend on the incumbent majority’s fear of provoking a backlash of support for the other party, though we do not expressly consider this possibility here.
address the desires of important swaths of the population, political entrepreneurs see an opening to challenge the political status quo.

I now have three hypotheses that are in principle testable. I do not test them here, however. Rather, in the next section I examine evidence from other scholarly work and show how it fits with my joint decision making model.

**Evidence: Theory to Numbers**

Each of the three hypotheses elaborated above deals with both redistributive (or ideological) and distributive (or pork/spending) policy. Both types of policy are measurable, but measurement poses problems as well.

For redistributive policy, measurement is problematic principally for two reasons: First, redistributive policy (or any policy that is not in principle purely porcine) can be broken up so that it looks like distributive policy (Cohen and Noll 1991). This can make it difficult to distinguish from distributive policies. Second, because redistributive policy effectively involves transfers of resources across groups, there is no good way to identify it absent detailed analysis of legislation. An additional problem with regard to redistributive policy lies in the formulation of the hypotheses. Policy outcomes are supposed to end up in a specific range of possible outcomes, but the range could be quite large. Moreover, without good (and comparable) information on policy and voter positions, evaluating outcomes in the terms of these hypotheses would be difficult indeed.

Distributive policy is less problematic, beyond the obvious issue of separating it from policy that is distributive in practice but not in intent. It involves the allocation of resources, but the effect is to improve at least some people’s lot without making anyone noticeably worse off. The easiest way to do this is to spend on pork and at the same time refrain from raising the necessary revenues to cover expenditure (Cox and McCubbins 1991; McCubbins 1991a; 1991b;
Heller, Bedfellow Politics v04.02a

Heller 2001b), effectively pushing the costs into the (discounted) future. The effect, of course, is budget deficits.

There is theoretical and empirical evidence linking bicameralism and budget deficits. In the US context, Cox and McCubbins (1991; see also, McCubbins 1991a; McCubbins 1991b) show that divided government leads to higher deficits, while Stewart (1989) shows that under certain circumstances divided government can lead to budget surplus. The difference depends on whether there is some outcome that the majority on each side of the divide prefers to reversionary policy.

Taking the argument about divided government into the realm of parliamentary democracies,24 Heller (1997) shows that the mere possibility of divided control—that is, the existence of a bicameral legislature—is linked to higher budget deficits. Extending the analysis, Heller (2001b) finds in contrast to evidence from the United States that budget deficits are larger the more closely each chamber’s composition mirrors that of the other. Finally, in a computer simulation of partisan spending in a bicameral legislature, Heller and Ryan (2000) show that parties have a strong incentive not to let rivals outspend them on reelection-oriented policy;25 this could imply that both parties spend heavily, but in the joint decision-making context it more likely translates into a desire on each party’s part to keep the other from spending anything at all.

The arguments and evidence presented by Heller (2001b) and Heller and Ryan (2000) are largely consistent with the joint decision-making model presented above. In the remainder of this

24 In the United States, government can be divided through divided control of the legislature or when different parties control the legislature and the executive. In parliamentary systems, institutionally divided control is possible only where parliament is bicameral. Some argue that coalition governments also are cases of divided control as well (Tsebelis 2002). While I believe this latter view both makes sense and is consistent with the argument I make in this paper, I do not investigate it here.

25 For our purposes, reelection spending and pork spending are identical.
section, I examine both in more detail and discuss how the model’s implications appear to be borne out in the real world. I begin with Heller and Ryan’s (2000) simulation of the effect of voter partisanship on spending.

**Partisan biases and resource allocation**

In their analysis of jointly taken spending decisions, Heller and Ryan (2000) focus on voters’ willingness to vote for different candidates/parties to different offices—that is, to vote a split ticket. The do so in the context of a game where parties compete for control over two offices, whose occupants must agree in order to take decisions. They claim that when “correlation between copartisan candidates” is low, parties have an incentive to spend heavily in order to curry voter favor. Basically, winning election to each office requires expending resources to win over voters for that office. When the correlation is high, by contrast, a voter who supports a party for one office is likely to support the same party for all offices. As long as the resources required to earn support for a given office remain constant, therefore, reelection-related spending should be higher the less loyal are voters to any particular party.

To fit the Heller-Ryan results into my analysis of joint decision making, I compare the outcomes they predict under unified and divided control, respectively, of the offices. I argue that their simulation implies that spending should higher when the same party controls both offices than when control over the offices is divided.

Under unified control of the offices, Heller and Ryan show that a party gets more utility from spending—more bang for the buck—when its voters are less likely to split their tickets. At one extreme, given a party-line electorate, any allocation of spending across copartisan candidates to the different offices yields essentially equal utility to the interested party. At the other extreme, where spending benefits the occupant of a given office rather than her party,
parties fare best when they allocate as much spending as possible (or, more accurately, the benefits of spending) equally to the different offices.

Under divided control of the offices, each party always is better off with higher spending on behalf of its incumbent. When voters focus more on the party than on the officeholder, a party that allowed its rival to produce pork without demanding a similar allocation for its own incumbents would suffer for it at the polls. When the partisan bang per buck is relatively low, by contrast (that is, voters support individual candidates rather than parties), spending for the benefit of one officeholder (of whatever party) has little effect on the fate of the other. Officeholders’ fates are in essence independent of one another.

My claim in this paper is that reelection-focused spending should be lower under divided control over offices—i.e., the chambers of a bicameral parliament. Taken together, these sketches of Heller and Ryan’s (2000) results support my claim, at least as long as voters focus primarily on party rather than on individual incumbents. Whether voters care about parties or not, each party always has an incentive to allocate as many resources for the reelection of its incumbents as possible. Under unified control, this is easy—and it makes sense to expect fairly high spending as the party in power seeks to maximize its prospects for holding on to office (in line with Equation 4).

Under divided control, the outcome depends more obviously on how important parties are for voters. When voters care a lot about parties, a party that allows pork that benefits its counterpart more than itself is very nearly committing political suicide: the benefits of pork credit accrue not only to the relevant incumbent, but also his copartisan who challenges the incumbent of the other office. One party’s gain, moreover, comes at the expense of the other party’s incumbent. Consequently, either pork should be allocated such that both incumbents
benefit equally, or no pork should be allocated at all. The latter seems likely if parties care about pork only instrumentally. When voters care little about parties, by contrast, pork that helps one incumbent’s prospects for retaining office has only a minimal effect on the other incumbent’s prospects. Each incumbent party thus stands to lose less by letting the other claim benefit for pork; if the possibility that the other party might gain control of both offices, and if the resulting policy outcome would be too detrimental, then it makes sense for a party to focus on holding on to one office even at the expense of helping the other party do the same. At the end of the day, voters who care little about parties lead parties to care a lot about pork and, concomitantly, less about other kinds of policy.

Heller and Ryan’s results support my hypotheses with regard to distributive policy, but suggest a caveat—voters’ partisan loyalty matters. That is, voters who care a lot about pork motivate parties to care about pork as well; if there is a tradeoff between caring about pork versus other kinds of policy (which is tantamount to saying that holding on to office takes on a value of its own, cf. Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1990), or if retaining office even if that means continuing to share authority guarantees acceptable outcomes, then parties have good reason to tolerate or even support legislation that helps their opponents hold on to their slice of authority in return for reciprocal treatment. When voters care a lot about pork, in other words, Heller and Ryan find that spending on pork ought to be high under both divided and unified control of offices.

On the other hand, when voters care enough about party labels to vote split tickets only rarely if at all, which suggests that they care about the kinds of policy outcomes the labels represent (Cox and McCubbins 1993; 1994), by contrast, the incentive to keep a rival party from taking unified control should lead parties both to block unreciprocated pork spending that
benefits rival parties and to refuse to reciprocate for any pork they might get. This incentive should lead to minimal or nonexistent spending under divided control. Under unified control, the benefits of spending are magnified, as spending for the benefit of one incumbent helps the other. When voters are relatively loyal partisans, therefore, by Heller and Ryan’s accounting spending should be higher under unified control than under divided control.  

Heller and Ryan’s simulated model of spending by officeholders bent on using the institutional endowments of office to achieve other goals jibes well with the distributive-policy implications of my hypotheses. But what of the real world? Heller’s (2001b) study of deficits in bicameral parliamentary systems yields conclusions similar to Heller and Ryan (2000), supported by evidence from nine countries.

**Bicameral chamber composition and deficit spending**

Heller posits that “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” logrolls should be more common when chamber majorities in bicameral parliaments are close together ideologically. According to Heller (2001b, 35), “tight party discipline” makes logrolls across parties that are ideologically distant from one another unpalatable. The result is lower budget deficits and, by implication, less policy output when chamber compositions are dissimilar—i.e., when “bicameral divergence” is high (this is consistent with Rohde 1991; see also, Cox and McCubbins 2001).

Heller uses to measures of divergence between chambers, one derived from power indices and the other from seat shares, to test his hypothesized link between bicameral divergence and deficits. His hypothesis closely mirrors my hypotheses in this paper, so his test is of particular interest. He finds, consistent with predictions, that “deficits would on average be higher by over 3 percent of GDP, all else constant, in bicameral legislatures with identically

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26 It is unclear how spending under unified control compares for loyal versus pork-focused voters. Heller and Ryan do not address this question.
composed chamber majorities” than where the chamber majorities share no members in common (2001b, 55). This result strongly supports the reasoning I have presented in this paper.

Discussion

The evidence I have drawn on to show support for my hypotheses deals only with spending and budget deficits. The authors responsible draw claim inferences about non-pork policy, but they present no evidence. My model suggests, however, that if policy other than pork were not an issue—if it did not matter to parties or if voters did not care about it at all—then the only reason for low spending would be a low voter tolerance for it.27 There would certainly be no systematic connection between deficits and the degree of bicameral divergence.

The model presented in this paper is silent with regard to party discipline. Yet Heller’s (2001b) argument and Heller and Ryan’s (2000) simulations suggest that my model applies only where party discipline is strong. On one hand, this might explain the disjuncture between my hypotheses and evidence of an opposite relationship between divergence and spending in the United States (Cox 1987; Cox and McCubbins 1991; Fiorina 1992; Jacobson 1991; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; McCubbins 1991a; 1991b), since US parties are famously undisciplined compared to their parliamentary counterparts. On the other hand, it points to a deeper question about the link between party discipline and ideological distance (Aldrich and Rohde 2000).

If parties are undisciplined in the sense that their members do not vote the same way and it is hard to predict how they will vote on any given issue, then it is hard to pinpoint their ideal points. If it is hard to pinpoint party ideal points, a) voters are less able to make decisions based on party positions and so rationally should seek other criteria—such as pork. This reaction is essentially the same as if voters saw party ideal points as close together. And b) parties in office

27 It is worth asking what kinds of voters would care only about pork but have a low tolerance for spending overall. I do not attempt to answer this question here.
have less information to determine how far apart they actually are. Under such circumstances, they might want to minimize their ideological differences in an effort to get something done. This is the case particularly if incumbent parties might face outside challenges, but it is worth noting as well that if parties are undisciplined there is no guarantee that the members of an incumbent majority in one chamber would be any better off if the other chamber were controlled by their copartisans, given the unpredictability that indiscipline implies. From this perspective, the distance between parties is in some measure a function of discipline. If that is the case, then the model in this paper is consistent with the discipline-based accounts of spending and joint decision making described above.

**Conclusion**

It is by now uncontroversial to claim that institutions matter. Institutions, after all, empower specific actors, who are thus able to privilege their own preferences in policy making. My claim in this paper goes a step further, beginning with the straightforward observation that because institutions empower specific actors, it matters who those actors are. This also is unsurprising and in fact provides the rationale for elections (and other means of screening and selecting officeholders; see Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). Moreover, not least among those who care about who holds office are officeholders themselves, because what other officeholders want determines how closely any one of them can move outcomes to his or her ideal point. What is new here is the recognition that officeholders might, through their policy-making influence, be able to affect the likelihood of their counterparts’ retaining office or being replaced.

The model I develop in this paper can be applied to institutions beyond bicameral legislatures. For example, legislative committees privilege committee members and particularly committee chairs. To what extent does committee-member behavior vary according to committee authority and the degree to which committee composition mirrors the composition of the entire
legislature? Alternatively, how does the ideological range of government parties and the inherent mismatch between the partisan makeup of government and the legislature affect coalitions’ ability to make policy (cf. Rohde 1991)? Is policy the product of partisan competition or intragovernmental cooperation designed to perpetuate the coalition through elections?\(^{28}\) The model also could provide insight into issues beyond the traditional domain of political science, such as the selection of members to corporate boards, or perhaps even the process of recruiting and retaining professors in academic departments.

At the end of the day, I am arguing that it is time to reconsider how we think about preferences. Officeholders have preferences over outcomes, but in the service of those primary preferences they also have preferences about who else holds office. To the extent that policy outcomes affect who gets or stays in office and who does not, preferences over who holds office will affect preferences over outcomes. The claim here is not so much that preferences are endogenous as that revealed preferences correspond not only to what is feasible at a given point in time, but also to the politics of what might be possible in the future.

\(^{28}\) We should not expect parties to help each other win office, since at the polls all parties are fundamentally in competition. If they do help each other—and there is at least anecdotal evidence that they sometimes do—then that calls into question much of how we think about political competition.
## Appendix

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$x \in [0,1]$</td>
<td>Ideological policy, normalized to lie between 0 and 1, inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\gamma_x(x) \in (0,1)$</td>
<td>Voter $v$’s perception of party influence on ideological policy outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x_i$</td>
<td>$i$’s ideological-policy ideal point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>Spending on non-ideological (pork) policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\phi_i(b_{il}) \in (0,1)$</td>
<td>Voter $v$’s perception of party $i$ in chamber $l$’s ability to deliver pork policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_{il}$</td>
<td>Amount of pork attributable to party $i$ in chamber $l$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\omega_v \in [0,1]$</td>
<td>Voter $v$’s weighting of ideological (versus pork) policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\theta_v(b_{il})$</td>
<td>Party $i$ in chamber $l$’s share of blame, given $v$’s dislike of government spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$d_v(x)$</td>
<td>Quadratic distance from $v$’s ideal point to $x$, i.e., $|x_v - x|$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$f_v^* (u_v(i),u_v(j))$</td>
<td>Probability that $v$ votes for party $i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x^*$</td>
<td>Policy outcome most favorable for party $i$’s electoral prospects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_{il}^*$</td>
<td>Pork level where $i$ in $l$’s marginal benefits and costs from spending are equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b^*$</td>
<td>The total amount of pork spending if $b_{il} = b_{il}^*$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


