

# Sequential Vote Buying

Ying Chen                      Jan Zápál\*

December 2020

## Abstract

To enact a policy, a leader needs votes from committee members with heterogeneous opposition intensities. She sequentially offers transfers in exchange for votes. The transfers are either promises paid only if the policy passes or paid up front. With transfer promises, a vote costs nearly zero. With up-front payments, a vote can cost significantly more than zero, but the leader is better off with up-front payments. The leader does not necessarily buy the votes of those least opposed. The opposition structure most challenging to the leader involves either a homogeneous committee or a committee with two homogenous groups. Our results provide an explanation for several empirical regularities: lobbying of strongly opposed legislators, the Tullock Paradox and expansion of the whip system in the U.S. House concurrent with ideological homogenization of parties. We also discuss several extensions including private histories and simultaneous offers.

*JEL Classification:* C78, D72, P16.

*Keywords:* vote buying; legislative bargaining; coalition building; endogenous sequencing; transfer promise; up-front payment; contracting with externalities.

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Chen: Department of Economics, Johns Hopkins University, ying.chen@jhu.edu. Zápál: CERGE-EI, a joint workplace of Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education, Charles University and the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Politických veznu 7, P.O. Box 882, 111 21 Prague 1, Czech Republic, j.zapal@gmail.com.

We thank discussants Wioletta Dzuída, Matías Iaryczower, seminar and conference audiences at Annual SAET Conference 2019, Bar-Ilan University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Col-legio Carlo Alberto, Columbia Political Economy Conference 2019, Cyprus CyMBA Workshop, European Meeting of the Econometric Society 2019, Osaka University, Princeton University, University of Bath, Waseda University, Washington Area Political Economy Workshop 2018, Wallis Conference in Political Economy 2019, World Congress of the Econometric Society 2020 for helpful comments and suggestions. Part of this research was conducted when Chen was visiting Kyoto Institute of Economic Research at Kyoto University, and she thanks the colleagues there for their warm hospitality.