Allan Drazen (University of Maryland)

“Intrinsic Versus Instrumental Reciprocity To Voters”

Abstract

Reciprocity to kindness is a feature of human behavior. Analogously, previous laboratory experimental evidence indicates that in a single election decision-makers reciprocate to the voters who elected them by giving them benefits after the election. Will candidates show intrinsic reciprocity when they desire to be reelected, so that rewarding voters from the previous election conflicts with attracting votes in the next election? That is, do instrumental motives in distributing benefits conflict with intrinsic reciprocity? We present a model in which a candidate gains reelection by signaling that her policies will help those citizens who are potential voters, which creates a tension if the candidate also wants to show reciprocity to those who voted for her in the past. We test the model in a lab experiment. Our results indicate that candidates take actions to help their chances of reelection that limits the amount of reciprocity they show to past voters, but that this effect depends on factors such as a voter’s cost of turning out. The results show that candidates use signaling as an electoral strategy, that voters respond to such signals as theory predicts, but that candidates differ in Their non-selfish motivations.