

# Bribing Voters Without Verification

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This article distinguishes between two types of vote buying mechanisms. If vote choices can be monitored, vote buyers will not discriminate amongst prospective voters, regardless of how they are expected to vote. If voting is secret, a vote buyer will pay opposition voters not to vote which forces the opposition to pay its own voters to ensure they do vote. This implies the secret ballot may be less effective in curbing bribery than originally thought.

## INTRODUCTION

When it was first introduced, the secret ballot was a key tool used by legislators to eliminate the bribery of potential voters. Political scientists at the turn of the century argued for passage of the law specifically for this purpose (Evans, 1917; Wigmore, 1889). Secrecy of the ballot eliminated the ability to monitor how those bribed voted, thereby eliminating candidates' incentive to bribe. This point was made succinctly by Wigmore:

No man has ever placed his money corruptly without satisfying himself that the vote was cast according to the agreement, or in a phrase which became only too common during the last campaign, without proof that 'the goods were delivered'; and when there is to be no proof but the word of the bribe-taker (who may have received thrice the sum to vote for the briber's opponent), it is idle to place any trust in such a use of money. In other words, take away all interest in committing an offense, and the offense will soon disappear. (Wigmore, 1889, p.31)

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**The Social Science Journal, Volume 35, Number 3, pages 435-443.**  
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Jerrold Rusk (1974) later noted that by eliminating vote payments, an important vote motivator was also removed. He argued that many voters relied on these payments for their inducement to vote. A similar hypothesis has been supported by regression analysis in Heckelman (1995) which found that, controlling for other electoral reform, the secret ballot accounted for a 7 percentage point reduction in gubernatorial turnout between 1870–1910.

This effect of the secret ballot, however, may be overstated. The secret ballot reduced bribery, but did not banish it from the electoral spectrum altogether. Although the incentive for candidates to disperse vote payments was lessened, it will be shown that the bribe patterns by candidates should merely be reduced and altered, not eliminated.

### BRIBING INCENTIVES

The testing of the secret ballot in Heckelman (1995) was limited to those states which enacted the law uniformly throughout the state. For consistency, the analysis here will do the same. As such, consider a state with a secret ballot law in effect.<sup>1</sup> While the state as a whole might be fairly heterogeneous in its population base, specific areas within the state can usually be disaggregated into homogeneous groups since individuals tend to live with people of their own socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, consider a state with three types of areas: highly Democratic (homogeneous), highly Republican (homogeneous), and mixed (heterogeneous). The areas are designated due to their past propensity to vote in specific patterns for whatever socioeconomic characteristics dominate these areas (McCormick, 1974; Kousser, 1973; Kleppner, 1980; Roth, 1986).

Contemporary voting studies also reveal that certain socioeconomic variables are good predictors of turnout.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the areas in question can be further disaggregated into high and low turnout areas. This results in the state being decomposed into six types of areas: high turnout Democratic (HD), low turnout Democratic (LD), high turnout Republican (HR), low turnout Republican (LR), high turnout mixed (HM), and low turnout mixed (LM).

HD and HR consist of the parties' core voters. LD and LR also contain partisan supporters, many of whom are not sufficiently motivated to vote of their own volition. HM voters could be labeled as "switchers" or swing voters.<sup>3</sup> Finally LM can be considered to be those individuals who are traditionally indifferent to the electoral process in its entirety, or a fairly evenly divided group of LD and LR voters living amongst themselves.

If candidates are not able to monitor voters' selections, they will limit their bribing to low turnout areas which favor them. Voters will go to the polls to collect their bribes, and once inside the polling booth, will vote for their favored candidate. No monitoring is necessary. Candidates will attract some opposition votes with bribes, but can expect to gain a disproportionate number of supporters.

Consider the incentives facing the Democratic candidates. Democrats will only bribe in LD areas. Most of the bribes will be wasted in HD, for many of these voters turn out to vote without cash incentives. Democratic bribing in this area is much less efficient. High turnout areas contain a disproportionate percentage of voters, so brib-

Table 1. Who Bribes: Candidate Bribery by Party Under Secret and Open Voting

Area	Electoral System	
	I. Secret	II. Open
LD	D	D,R
HD	none	D,R
LM	none	D,R
HM	none	D,R
LR	R	D,R
HR	none	D,R

Note: Abbreviations explained in text. None implies no bribery.

ery is not necessitated. Of course, the same is true of Republican candidates, who should only bribe in LR areas.

Democrats will not bribe in any of the Republican areas (HR or LR) since voters will be likely to accept the bribe and then vote Republican anyway, since their actual vote is secretive. Candidates will not know they have been cheated and cannot therefore enforce the vote contract. They will not form contracts in any of the Republican areas and need not make contracts in HD. HD voters do not need the added incentive of cash bribes to ensure voting.

Mixed area residents will not be bribed either. Without knowing how any particular individual is planning on voting, the candidates are equally likely to bribe a Republican or a Democratic voter. On net, candidates are not likely to gain any additional voters, but lose the money spent on bribery. Bribery in these areas does not benefit the candidates.

Thus, Democratic candidates will bribe only in low turnout Democratic areas, and Republicans will limit their bribery to low turnout Republican areas. Bribery will still take place, but is limited to only certain areas. See Column I (*Secret*) of Table 1.

Bribery, in fact, still takes place in contemporary elections. Democratic campaigns often send buses to escort voters to the polls, but this transportation is usually limited to specific homogeneous areas that tend to vote Democratic but have low turnout.<sup>4</sup> Buses act as a mechanism to compensate voters for their transportation cost of voting. In this respect, busing is no different than offering cash to cover taxi or gas costs. Buses simply act as a more efficient (cheaper) means of bribery for the parties.

Without secrecy of the ballot, bribery is unlimited. Democrats will raid Republican and mixed areas, since they can ensure all bribed voters will specifically vote for them. Similarly, Republicans can invade traditionally Democratic and mixed areas, because even if they bribe a Democratic voter, they can be sure of how that person will vote in this election. Voters will not attempt to cheat their bribers because they know their actual vote is public knowledge.

Knowing the opposition will bribe voters traditionally in their camps, candidates will be forced to bribe their own voters just to keep them. Thus, bribery is rampant under an open ballot system. All areas are vulnerable to both candidates. Democrats will bribe LD voters to ensure they vote; HD voters to ensure they still vote for them; and HM, LM, HR, and LR voters to attract new voters. Similarly, Republicans can bribe in all areas of the state as well. See Column II (*Open*) of Table 1.

In comparison, the secret ballot transforms the bribery incentive. Candidates will ignore four of the six area types. Under secrecy, there is no advantage to dispersing bribe money outside of low turnout, partisan areas. Bribery is used merely to motivate partisan abstainers. There is little incentive to bribe voters outside of specific areas. Prior to the secret ballot, however, candidates were limited in their bribery only by their pocketbooks. Without secrecy, candidates could monitor voters to ensure they voted for them regardless of their original intentions.

### DEFLATIONARY BRIBERY

Gary Cox and Morgan Kousser (1981) explain how the secret ballot may have changed the type of bribery that took place. Specific types of voters (notably those in HD or HR areas) were still expected to vote for the opposition party. Although candidates could not ensure these voters would vote for them, even when bribed, they could bribe voters to stop them from voting. In their terminology, Cox and Kousser refer to this type of bribery as deflationary, and the previously discussed, standard type of bribery which induces voting, as inflationary.

Following their logic, Democrats might use deflationary bribes in an HR area in order to keep these voters away from the polls. Since candidates are not able to verify the voters' choice, they may try to keep certain types of voters from voting at all, if they were expected to vote for the opposition. While a secret ballot makes it impossible to verify *how* one votes, it does not hinder the ability to learn *if* one votes. The act of voting can still be monitored, thus making vote contracts feasible. Cox and Kousser argue that inflationary bribery would be eliminated, but the implication from the presence of deflationary bribery actually suggests otherwise.

Republicans are now forced to bribe in an area which they could have previously safely assumed would have turned out for them. If, as Cox and Kousser hypothesize, HR areas are vulnerable to Democratic deflationary bribery, Republican candidates must now use bribes to secure their own voters even in high turnout areas. Under an open voting system, Republicans had to bribe HR voters to keep them from voting Democratic (in case they were bribed by Democrats to switch votes). Under a secret ballot, Republicans must bribe HR voters to ensure they do vote (in case they were bribed by Democrats to abstain).

Table 2. How to Bribe: Type of Candidate Bribery by Party Under Secret and Open Voting

Area	Electoral System	
	<i>I. Secret</i>	<i>II. Open</i>
LD	D,r	D,R
HD	D,r	D,R
LM	none	D,R
HM	none	D,R
LR	d,R	D,R
HR	d,R	D,R

Note: Abbreviations explained in text. None implies no bribery. Capital letters denote inflationary bribery, lower-case letters denote deflationary bribery.

Democratic bribery in low turnout Republican areas in secret ballot elections will not be efficient since these people are unlikely to vote in the first place. However, since this is the exact area targeted by Republicans to spur turnout, Democrats may be well advised to bribe these voters before the Republicans do. Thus, Democrats use inflationary bribes in all Democratic areas (HD and LD) and deflationary bribes in all Republican areas (HR and LR). For a comparison between open (inflationary only) and secret ballot (inflationary and deflationary) bribery, see Table 2.

The original analysis suggested candidates would limit their bribery under a secret ballot to low turnout areas which traditionally favor them (Table 1). However, if candidates engage in deflationary bribery, bribery will extend into high turnout partisan areas as well (Table 2). Both candidates engage in bribery in these areas with the favored candidate attempting to spur turnout, while the other candidate tries to reduce turnout. Heterogeneous areas are still left unbribed. Accounting for deflationary turnout results in more bribery than previously suggested under a secret ballot, but still less bribery than under open balloting (see Table 2).

Even without deflationary bribery, inflationary bribery is not completely eliminated by a secret ballot as would be suggested by Wigmore (1889) and others (see Table 1). Cox and Kousser's discussion of deflationary bribery also underestimates the amount of inflationary bribery likely to take place (Table 2). Wherever there is deflationary bribery by one party, it can be expected that inflationary bribery by the other party will also occur.

## DISCUSSION

Two recent examples of possible election bribery outline the differences in potential strategy for vote buying.<sup>5</sup> Running for New Jersey governor in 1993, Republican Christine Todd Whitman was trailing considerably the Democratic incumbent, Jim Florio. A New York Times/CBS poll two weeks prior to the election revealed a 49%–34% lead for Florio. Whitman, however, won the election by two percentage points (50–48). Ed Rollins, Whitman's campaign manager, claimed his party offered \$500,000 in payments to black ministers and Democratic campaign workers in an effort to suppress the urban black vote. The ministers were paid not to preach to their constituents about the election, and the campaign workers were paid to stay home on election day to prevent them from canvassing urban areas to stir up voters. This type of deflationary bribery would be consistent with a liberal interpretation of Cox and Kousser. Although the potential voters were not directly paid, the money was allegedly directed into MD and HD areas.

However, black leaders across the state denied involvement in any such scheme and Rollins later retracted his story. An investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice and New Jersey Attorney General failed to uncover any evidence to support Rollins' original claim, so it is not clear whether or not these bribes actually took place. This strategy of targeting bribes to lessen black voting would have been rational since they were expected to predominately support the opposition, although it would be less effective (but perhaps cheaper and less overt) than paying the black voters directly not to vote.

This election can be contrasted with the June 1993 Los Angeles mayoral run-off election where vote purchasing has been well documented. The last pre-election poll conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* on June 1 predicted both Michael Woo (supported by the Democratic party) and Richard Riordan (supported by the Republican party) to be deadlocked in a virtual tie, with each having 46% of the vote among "likely voters". However, Woo held a large 48%–38% advantage among all the registered voters. Los Angeles municipal elections have historically garnered relatively few voters, and the "likely voters" in the *Times* poll represented less than half of the registered voters in their poll sample (500 out of 1,091). Depending upon interpretation, the city of Los Angeles could be classified as either an LM or LD area for the purpose of this election. While the core voters appear split between the two candidates, the registered non-voters appear to favor the Democratic candidate.

To bolster its chances, the Democratic campaign offered doughnuts to any voter who presented a voting stub as proof of voting. The analysis in this article suggests specific results should occur due to the doughnut bribes. Turnout should increase due to the higher benefit of receiving the doughnuts. However, since the doughnuts are not

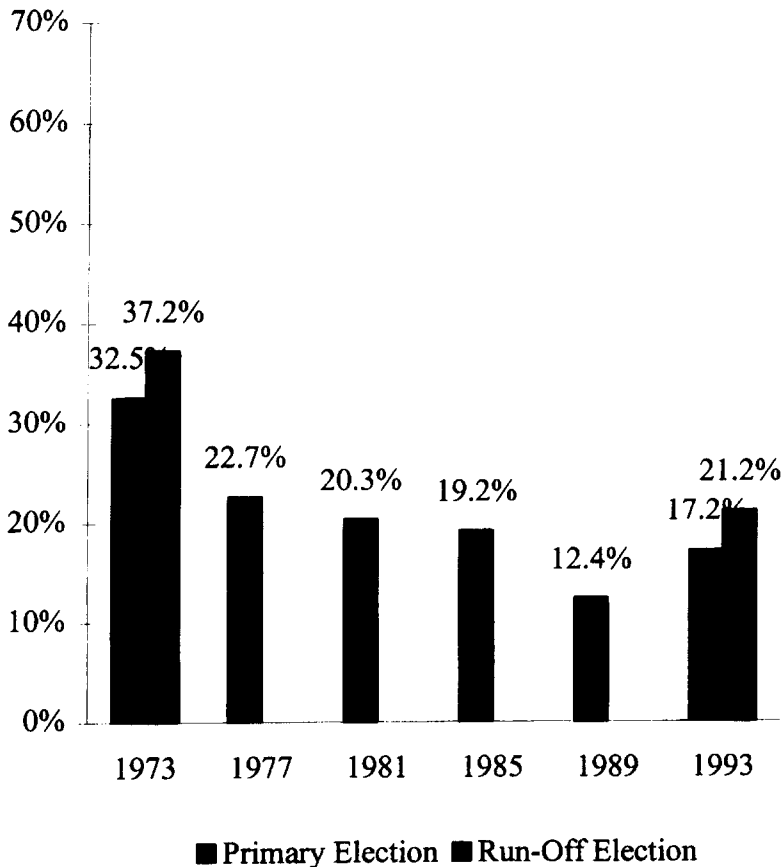


Figure 1. Turnout of Age-eligible Population in Los Angeles Mayoral Elections

limited to any specific type of voter, many of these bribes would be wasted going to those who would have voted even without the additional incentive. It should also be expected that many of the doughnut takers would actually vote for Riordan, since there is no mechanism in place to determine how these individuals voted. If the poll results were accurate, the Democratic party should expect to attract a higher percentage of Democrats among the “new” voters, but many doughnuts would go to core voters for both candidates, and some “new” Republicans would also be attracted by the prospect of doughnuts.

To test the turnout effect, we can consider the general pattern of Los Angeles mayoral elections to determine if it was altered by the added component of doughnut bribes. In general, turnout is affected by both potential benefits and costs incurred by the voters.<sup>6</sup> Following Anthony Downs’ (1957) seminal work and the contribution by William H. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook (1968), the calculus of voting is often presented using an equation of the form:

$$\text{Net Benefits from Voting} = \text{Probability of tie} * \text{Net Preferred Candidate Benefit} \\ - \text{Cost of Voting} + \text{Civic Duty}$$

Voting is considered to generate an indirect benefit which is dependent upon the election outcome, a direct opportunity cost, and a direct benefit based on one’s notion of the importance of participating in the voting process. Those that vote are expected to have higher levels of civic duty compared to the abstainers.

Turnout levels, based on the ratio of votes cast compared to the number of persons eighteen and older, are shown in Figure 1.<sup>7</sup> Turnout had been steadily declining in the primary elections since 1973 until an increase in 1993. It is unlikely voting costs, such as transportation and time, have changed much in recent years or that civic pride suddenly made a major recovery, so the direct costs and benefits in the calculus of voting are probably not a major component of turnout variation. Yet the primary mayoral election in April 1993 saw a substantial increase in voting, and a further increase in the special run-off election in June of that year.

Is the increase in turnout in the June election due to the bribes, or the special nature of the run-off election? Primary elections in Los Angeles are supposed to be non-partisan, as candidates are listed on the ballot denoted only by their name and occupation, not party affiliation. In reality, both major political parties typically align themselves with one of the candidates and this is well known by voters. A run-off election is held if no candidate gains a majority of votes. The last time a run-off election was held prior to 1993 was in 1973. This was Tom Bradley’s first victory as mayor and he remained on the ballot every year until 1993. Although turnout was always low, it crept lower the longer he remained on the ballot. More potential voters may have chosen to stay home on election day believing the election to be pre-determined by Bradley’s popularity. Thus, the 1993 primary election increase in turnout may be due in part to the lack of a (popular) incumbent on the ballot. Voters may have expected this race to be much closer (increasing the probability of a tie, and therefore the net voting benefit), which in fact it was since a run-off election was subsequently required.

With a run-off election called, all voters would now be convinced of the closeness in the vote, and might (mistakenly) believe their individual vote would spell the differ-

ence. In this case, the probability of a tie occurring should they not bother to vote would be significantly different from zero. The net benefit from voting in the run-off election would be higher than in the primary election, and this primary election could also have had higher net benefits than in the past elections.

In the context of this article, the analysis of this run-off election focused on the new bribes offered, which alters the calculus of voting by adding the value of the doughnut to the net benefit equation. Any voter can receive the doughnuts by retaining their vote stub. Thus net benefits for the 1993 run-off election are increased in two manners: increasing the probability of tie, and adding a new term for doughnut value that represents a direct benefit from the act of voting (and which is unaffected by the potential outcome of the election). Therefore it is not clear which of these effects contributed to the higher turnout in the run-off election.

Comparing the previous run-off election in 1973 with its primary turnout level, it is seen that turnout increased in 1973 as well. There was no vote purchasing agreements reported for that election. We can expect the entire increase to be due to perceived vote closeness.<sup>8</sup> In 1973, the run-off election attracted 95,643 new voters, an increase of 14.4% over the primary election. In 1993, the run-off election attracted 108,380 new voters which represents an increase of 22.8%. Although we might normally expect a higher absolute number of voters simply due to population increase, the 1993 run-off generated a higher number of voters in percentage terms as well. If the 1973 run-off is assumed to be typical, there remains almost 8.5% of increased turnout unexplained by the 1993 run-off election. The doughnut bribes may go a long way toward explaining this residual, since there does not appear to be any other factors that differed between the primary and run-off election in 1993.

While turnout did increase in the run-off election, partly as a result of the doughnuts, it must be remembered that these bribes were not limited to Democratic voters. The likelihood remains high that the bribes attracted Riordan, as well as Woo, supporters to the polls. In fact, Riordan won the election by a margin of 8 points (54%-46%). Republican as well as Democratic voters accepted the bribes but were free to vote as they had originally intended. The doughnuts should not have been expected to help the Democrats carry the election. These bribes were not limited to any specific area of the city. The Democrats could have made better use of the doughnuts by offering them only in those districts favoring the Democratic candidate.

As the previous analysis suggests, this strategy would motivate individuals in these particular areas to vote, and most of these voters could be reasonably expected to vote Democratic. In this way, more doughnuts could be reserved for Democratic voters even though there is no mechanism available to ensure doughnut voters will in fact vote Democratic. By limiting the bribes to only those areas of specific socioeconomic characteristics (or areas pollsters suggest are highly Democratic), Democratic bribery could have been made more efficient.

## NOTES

1. The analysis can be extended to the remaining states by making the unit of analysis the countries or cities which do not operate strictly under a secret ballot.

2. For comparison across states, see Kim, Petrocik, and Enokson (1975). A widely cited study which uses probit analysis on individual-level data is Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980).
3. This terminology is borrowed from Key (1966).
4. By example of stereotyping, Democrats should not (do not) send transportation to rich white areas, nor should (do) Republicans transport poor minorities to the polls.
5. This section comprises a discussion of possible deflationary bribery, where information is taken from various issues of *The New York Times*, and inflationary bribery based on information from various issues of *The Los Angeles Times*.
6. See the references in Heckelman (1995) for a survey of rational choice turnout models.
7. I thank the Los Angeles Office of City Clerk Election Division for assistance in accumulating the vote totals for past elections. The number of potential age-eligible voters is estimated by geometric interpolation from the 1970, 1980, and 1990 census. The 1993 estimate is projected by assuming the same population growth rates as existed between 1980 to 1990.
8. Of course there could also be random error in this difference, such as more voters being sick on primary day than for the run-off election. There is no reason to expect this to be different in 1973 than in 1993.

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