Abstract
Why might citizens vote against redistributive policies from which they would seem to benefit? Many scholars focus on “wedge” issues such as religion or race, but another explanation might be geographically-based patronage or pork. We examine the tension between redistribution and patronage with a model that combines partisan elections across multiple districts with legislation in spatial and divide-the-dollar environments. The model yields a unique equilibrium that describes the circumstances under which poor voters support right-wing parties that favor low taxes and redistribution, and under which rich voters support left-wing parties that favor high taxes and redistribution. The model suggests that one reason standard tax and transfer models of redistribution often do not capture empirical reality is that redistributive transfers are a less efficient tool for attracting votes than are more targeted policy programs. The model also underlines the central importance of party discipline during legislative bargaining in shaping the importance of redistribution in voter behavior, and it describes why right-wing parties should have an advantage over left-wing ones in majoritarian systems. (JEL: D72)