

Fry B R & Winters R F. The politics of redistribution.

Amer. Polit. Sci. Rev. 64:508-22, 1970.

[Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA and Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH]

The study examined relationships between a variety of economic and political variables and the redistributive impact of state revenues and expenditures. It indicated that the political variables examined bore significant, and independent, relationships to interstate differences in the allocation of tax burdens and expenditures benefits across income classes. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 140 publications.]

Brian R. Fry

Department of Government
and International Studies
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208

March 13, 1987

The idea for "The politics of redistribution" came from a class discussion in a seminar at Stanford taught by Ray Wolfinger. We had been examining the works of Thomas Dye¹ that noted the dominant influence of economic variables on public policy as measured by levels of public spending. It occurred to me that political variables might be more influential in determining the distribution of governmental spending rather than its absolute level. This stimulated some class discussion, and afterward I discussed the matter further with my classmate, Dick Winters. I thought we might be able to use a Tax Foundation study of the allocation of tax burdens and expenditure benefits across income classes to get at the distribution issue. The idea, admittedly, was not fully formed in our minds at that time. Dick wasn't sure what I meant

by redistribution, and I had the mistaken notion that we would be dealing with some form of marginalism or incrementalism. The process that ensued was a testament to collaboration. The study was a joint venture in its truest sense and one improved by contributions of each of the authors as well as faculty members and fellow students, who read and reacted to the many versions of the manuscript.

The project began in 1968. We delivered the paper at the 1969 convention of the American Political Science Association and received the award for the best paper presented at the convention that year. In 1970 the paper was published in the *American Political Science Review*. The paper was later reprinted in the *Bobbs-Merrill series*² and was even translated for publication in Korea. The response of two fledgling academics to all of this was, "Gee, this publishing business is really pretty easy!" That was a testament to the innocence of youth.

The study did turn out to have substantial impact. It was part of an effort to develop measures of public policy other than levels of spending. It dealt with an important dimension of public activity: the redistributive consequences of governmental taxes and spending.³ It also covered, however imperfectly, the broader question of whether politics makes a difference in determining public policy outcomes—a matter of some controversy given previous research findings and one that spread disillusionment about the efficacy of governmental activities.⁴ The study is one that, in retrospect, we would probably do differently if we were able to do it again. But it seems to have been an article that was right for its time.

1. Dye T. *Politics, economics, and the public: policy outcomes in the American states*.

Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1966. 314 p. (Cited 380 times.)

2. Fry B R & Winters R F. *The politics of redistribution*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, [1971?]. 15 p.

Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in Political Science No. PS-467.

3. Dye T. Party and policy in the states. *J. Politics* 46:1097-116, 1984.

4. Browning R. Presidents, Congress, and policy outcomes: U.S. social welfare expenditures, 1949-77.

Amer. J. Polit. Sci. 29:197-216, 1985.