

Inequality-Aware Partial Market Design

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Motivation

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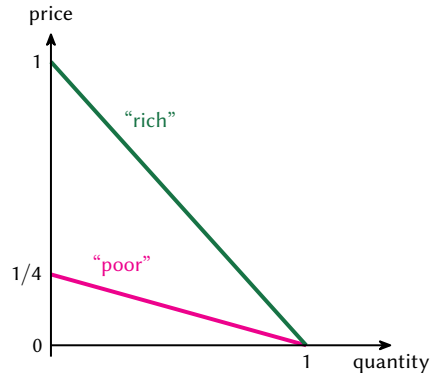
IPMD: What changes if the social planner can design only part of the market?

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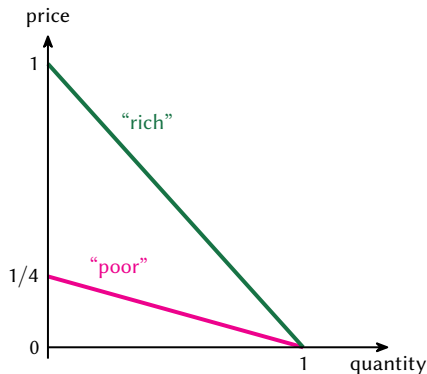
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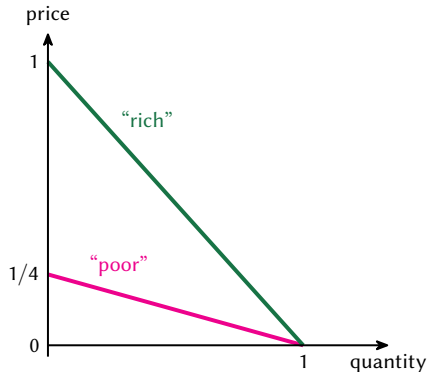
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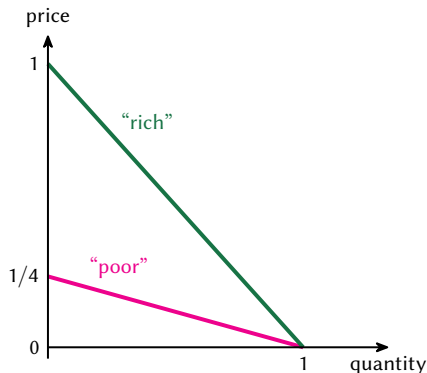
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- The social planner assigns weights $\mathbb{E}[\omega] = 1$ to producers and public expenditure.



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	poor consumption	rich consumption	price	total surplus
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full design				

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- ▶ Under full design, the social planner taxes consumption to redistribute to the poor.
- ▶ If the poor had access to the private market, they would purchase positive quantities!

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- ▶ A public option expands consumption; price increases impact the rich the most.
- ▶ Equilibrium effects on price complicate the design of optimal redistribution.

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Intuition:

- Topping up changes the outside options of participants of the redistribution program.

Two Challenges

As the example shows, there are two main challenges in partial market design:

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Without equilibrium effects, the price is exogenously given.

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② Outside options

Design choices (e.g., topping up) changes consumers' outside options.

Consumers' outside options are type-dependent, presenting a technical challenge.

Equilibrium Effects

based on “The Public Option and Optimal Redistribution”

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In recent years, **public options** have gained traction in policy discussions.

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Question. How do equilibrium effects shape optimal redistribution with a public option?

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The good is produced competitively; the supply curve is $S(p)$, with inverse $P = S^{-1}$.

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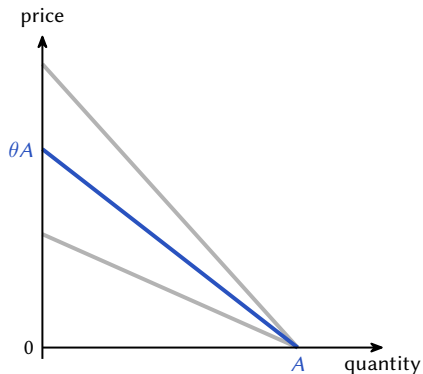
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 $\Theta \subset \mathbb{R}_+$ is compact, and types θ have a CDF F , which has full support on Θ .
- ▶ Each consumer derives utility $u(q, \theta) - t$ from quantity $q \in [0, A]$ at total price t .

Assume that $u(\cdot, \theta) : [0, A] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is increasing, strictly concave, and satisfies strict SCP.

Example: $u(q, \theta) = \theta \left(Aq - \frac{1}{2}q^2 \right)$.

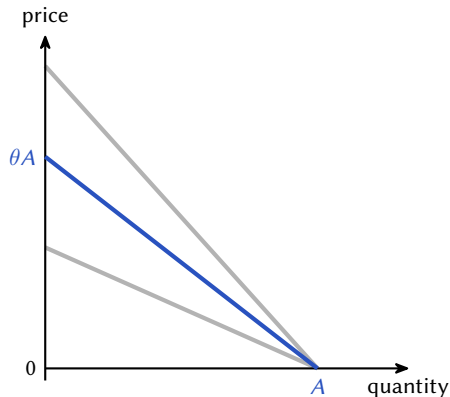


Laissez-Faire Equilibrium

- Each consumer solves

$$D(p, \theta) \in \arg \max_{q \in [0, A]} [u(q, \theta) - pq].$$

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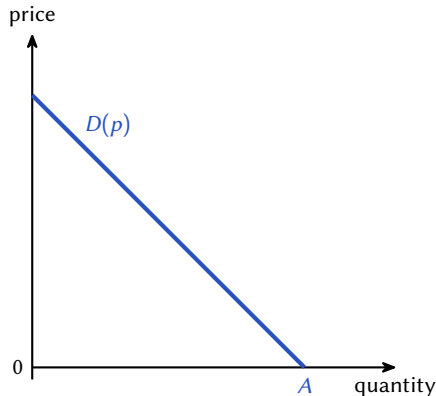
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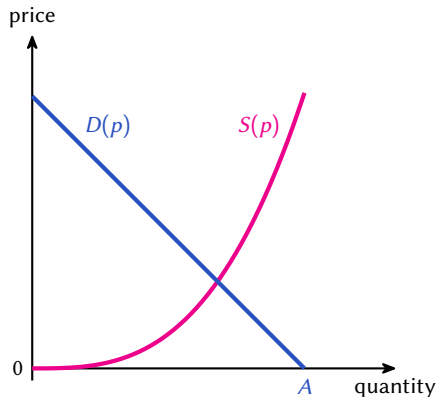
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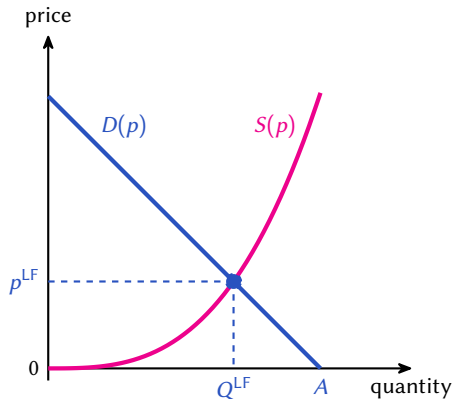
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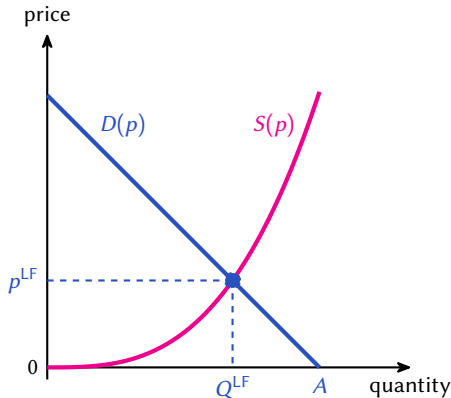
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- Expanding aggregate demand increases price!



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- ▶ μ is **deterministic** if $\mu = \delta_e$ for some $e \in E$ (i.e., the lottery is degenerate).
Otherwise, μ is **randomized** (i.e., the lottery is nondegenerate).

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- #1. The social planner chooses an allocation rule $\mu \in \Delta(E)$.
- #2. Consumers (voluntarily) apply for the public option, and entitlements are realized.
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- ▶ **Public expenditure**: a dollar of public expenditure has social cost $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}_+$,

$$C(\mu; Q) = \alpha P(Q) \int_E e d\mu(e).$$

Related Work

- ▶ **Redistributive Mechanism Design.** Che, Gale and Kim (2013); Condorelli (2013); Dworczak (r) Kominers (r) Akbarpour (2021); Akbarpour (r) Dworczak (r) Kominers (2022); Akbarpour (r) Dworczak (r) Kominers (2024); Pai and Strack (2024); Kang and Watt (2026); ...
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- ▶ **Methodological Tools.**
 - Concavification: Aumann and Maschler (1995); Kamenica and Gentzkow (2011); ...
 - ~ **This paper:** market clearing is mathematically equivalent to a “Bayes plausibility” constraint.

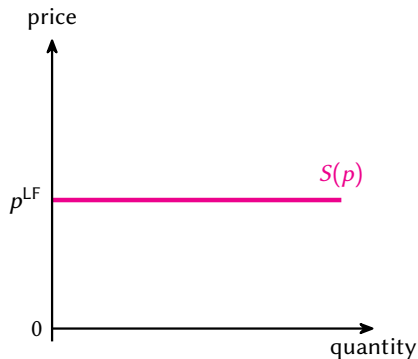
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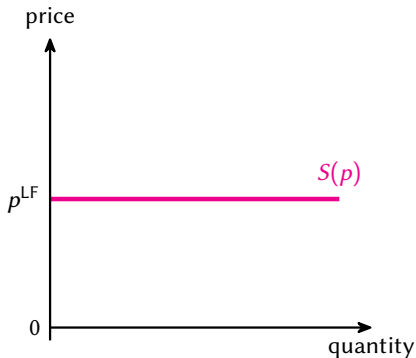
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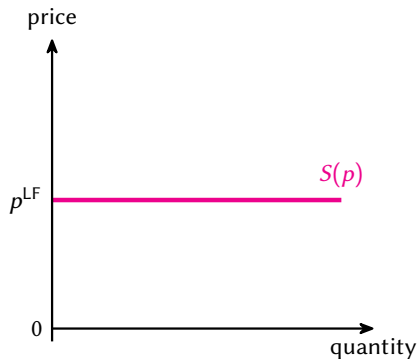
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- ▶ When supply is perfectly elastic, there are no equilibrium effects or randomization.
- ▶ Thus, equilibrium effects can lead to optimal randomization (and justify randomization).
- ▶ This challenges proposals that advocate for “**universality**” (Sitaraman and Alstott, 2019).
 - ↪ Nonuniform entitlements may be better!



Main Result #2: Zero Entitlements Can Be Optimal

Theorem (informal). Conditional on intervention, it can be optimal to allocate **zero units** with **positive probability** (and sometimes is).

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- ▶ When supply is perfectly elastic, there is a deterministic optimal allocation.

Conditional on intervention, it allocates a positive quantity with probability 1.

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- ▶ This challenges proposals that advocate for using the public option as a “**baseline**.”

Analysis: Direct Effect vs. Indirect Effect

Write weighted total surplus (i.e., the social planner's objective) as

$$TS(\mu; Q) = CS(\mu; Q) + PS(Q) - C(\mu; Q).$$

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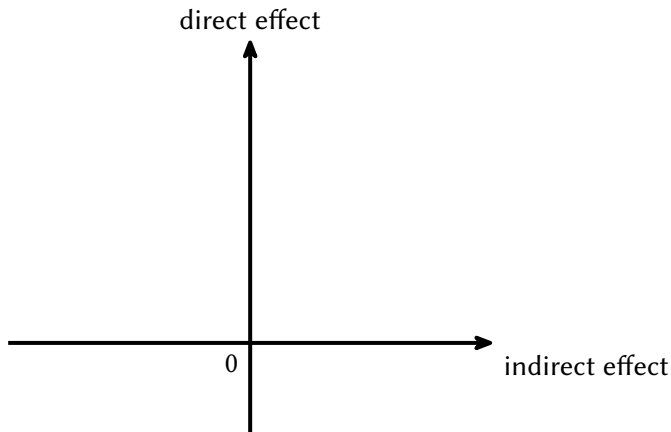
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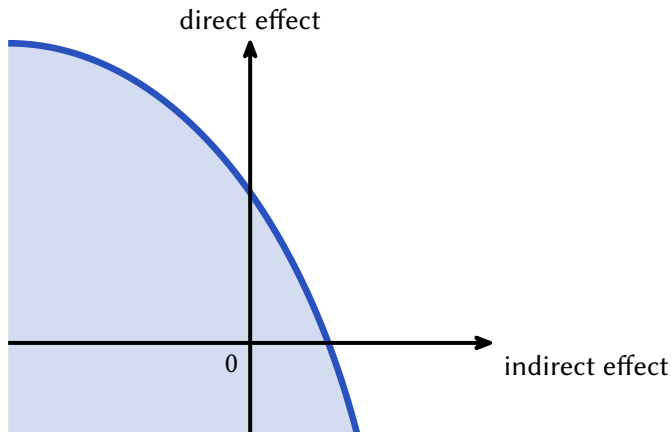
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Key Trade-Off: Direct Effect vs. Indirect Effect [▶ more](#)



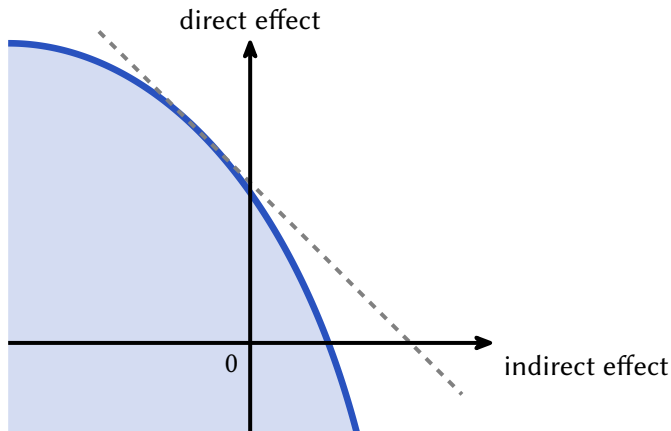
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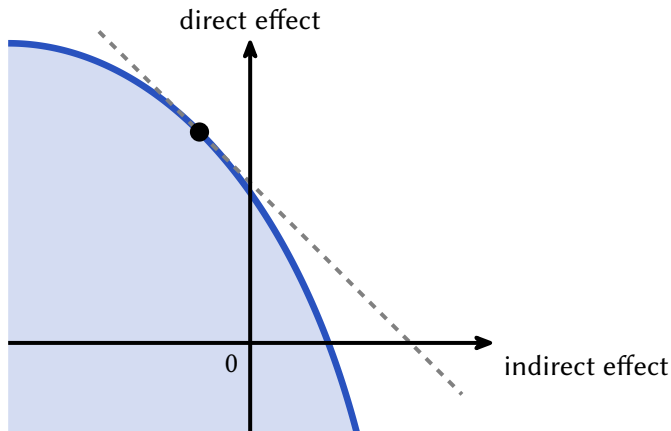
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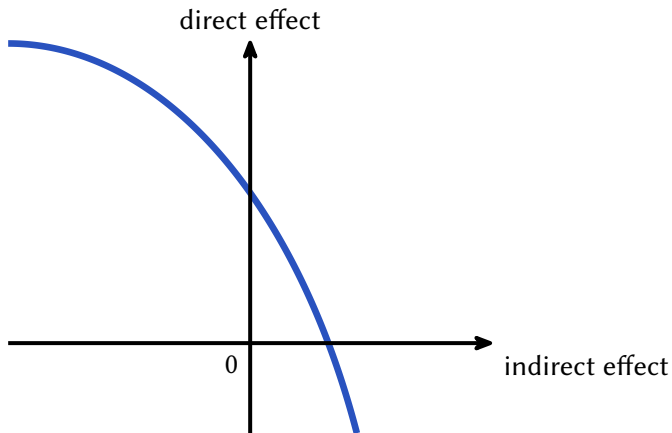


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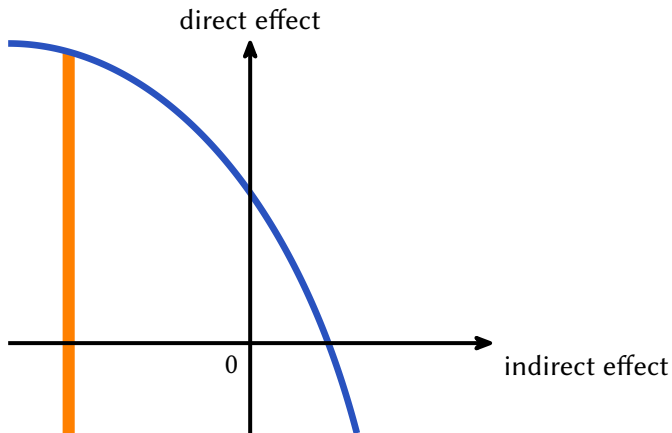
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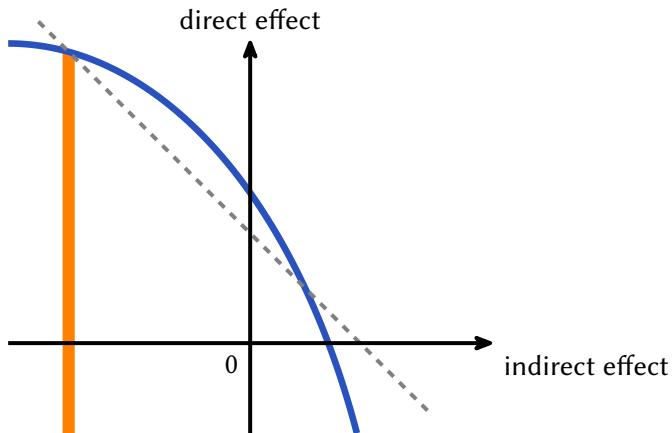
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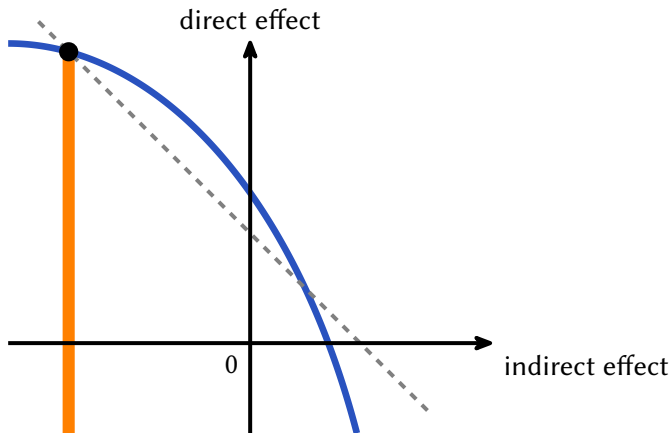
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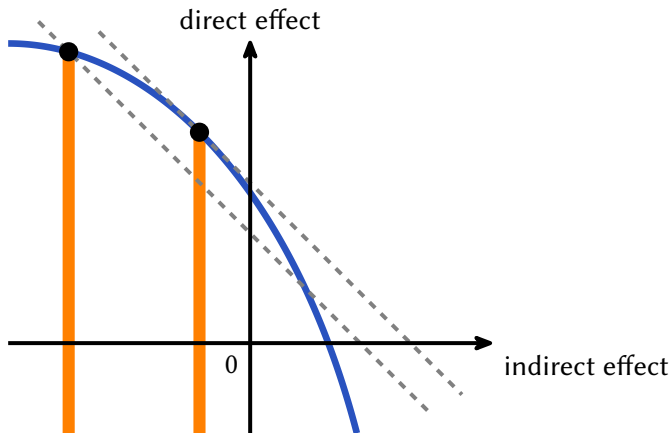
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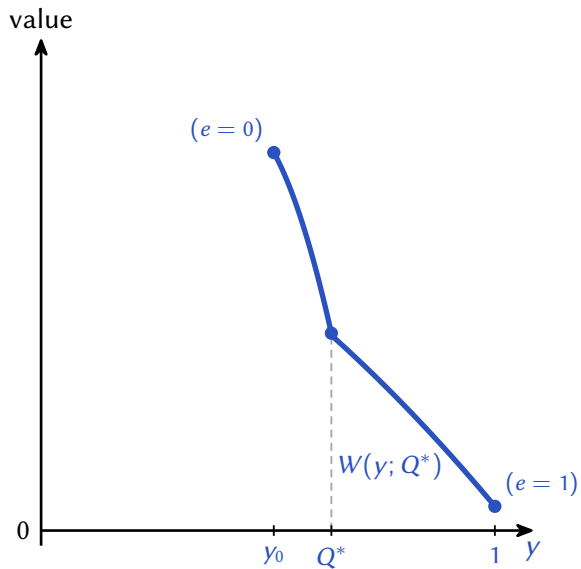
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The objective is

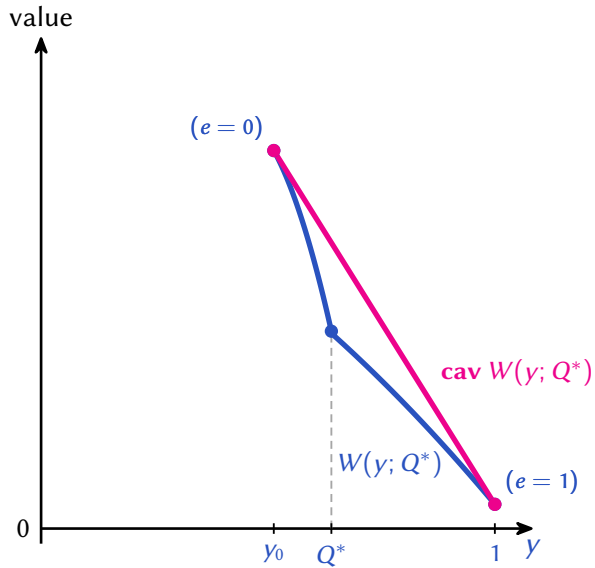
$$W(y; Q) := \int_{\Theta} [V(e(y), \theta; Q) - \alpha e(y)P(Q)] \, dF(\theta).$$

This is **consumer surplus – public expenditure**, in units of **total consumption** (y).

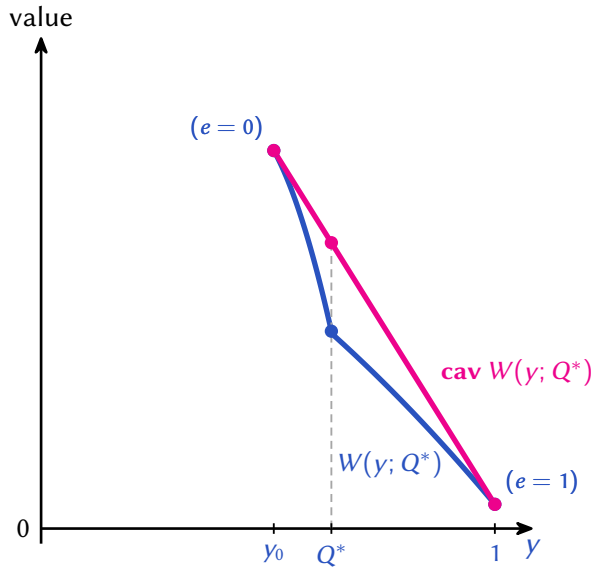
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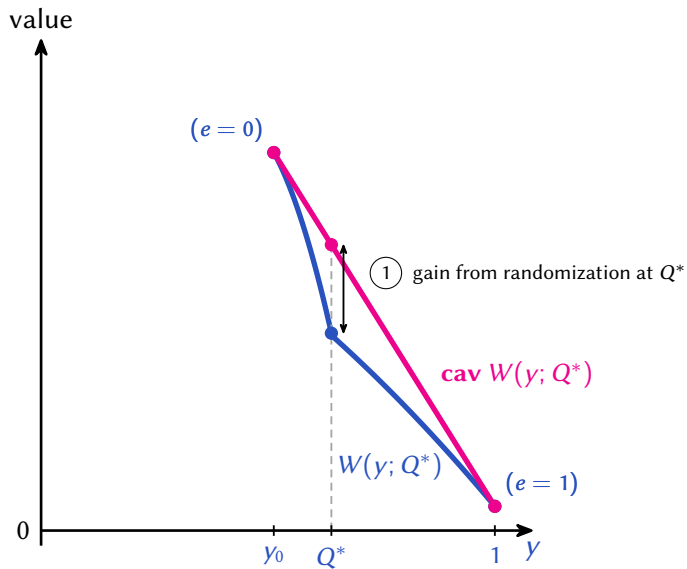
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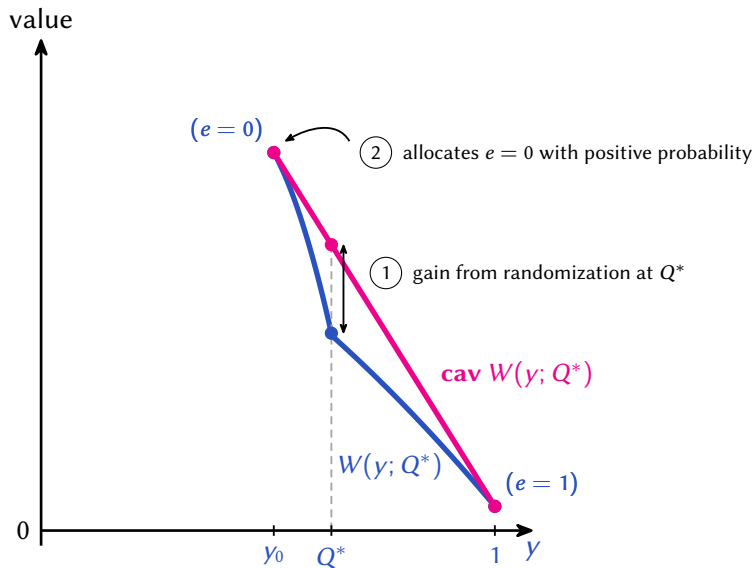
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Main Results Revisited

Theorem. A **randomized** allocation is strictly optimal iff $W(Q^*; Q^*) \neq \text{cav } W(Q^*; Q^*)$ for every

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Theorem. Define

$$\text{rad } W(z; Q) := z \sup_{y \geq z} \frac{W(y; Q)}{y}.$$

Every optimal allocation rule **randomizes over positive entitlements** iff $\text{rad } W(Q^*; Q^*) < \text{cav } W(Q^*; Q^*)$ for every

$$Q^* \in \arg \max_Q [\text{PS}(Q) + \text{cav } W(Q; Q)].$$

Summary

- ① Equilibrium effects can lead to **optimal randomization**.

Without equilibrium effects, the optimal allocation rule is deterministic.

- ② Equilibrium effects can lead to **zero entitlements** conditional on intervention.

Without equilibrium effects, entitlements are positive conditional on intervention.

In the paper, sufficient conditions are derived in terms of **elasticity of supply**.

Outside Options

based on “Topping Up and Optimal Redistribution” (with Mitchell Watt)

Motivation

Governments often redistribute through in-kind programs:

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Topping up is often a design choice of in-kind programs and affects screening:

- ▶ Unlike public housing units, housing vouchers would allow topping up (if desired).
- ▶ While recipients benefit, topping up weakens screening by expanding participation.

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“Programs with or without the possibility of topping up have different welfare properties. Currently, there are no general results regarding the merits of the two. [...] Nor are there any general results on the characterization of optimal public provision policies, targeted or universal.”

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Model

- ▶ There is a unit mass of consumers demanding some quantity of a good, q .
The good is produced competitively at a constant marginal cost, $c > 0$.

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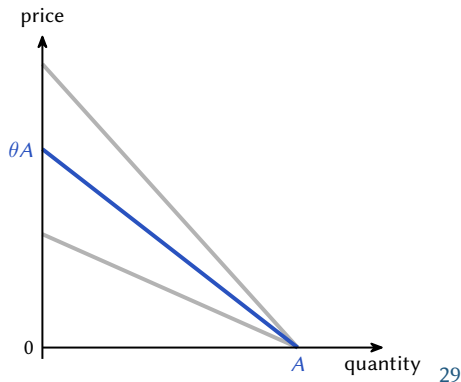
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Types θ have a CDF F , which is continuously differentiable with density $f > 0$ on $[\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]$.
- ▶ Each consumer derives utility $\theta v(q) - t$ from quantity $q \in [0, A]$ at total price t .

Assume that $v : [0, A] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is increasing and strictly concave (with $v' > 0$ and $v'' < 0$).

Example: $v(q) = Aq - \frac{1}{2}q^2$ (linear demand).

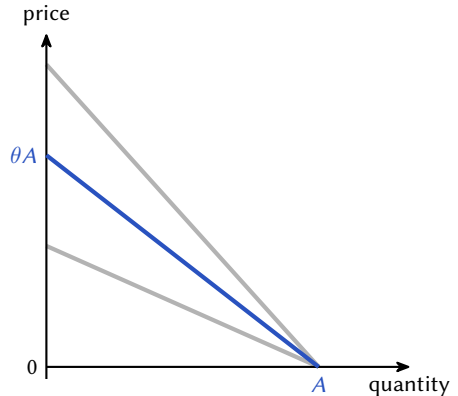


Laissez-Faire Equilibrium

- ▶ Since the private market is perfectly competitive, price = marginal cost = c .
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Since v is strictly concave, there is a unique maximizer $q^{\text{LF}}(\theta)$, assumed to be interior.

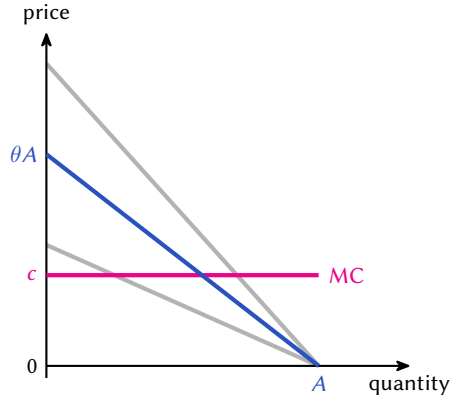


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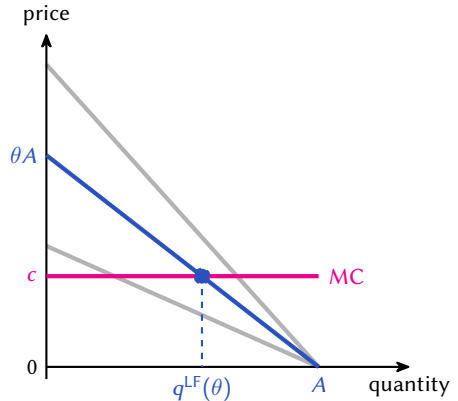


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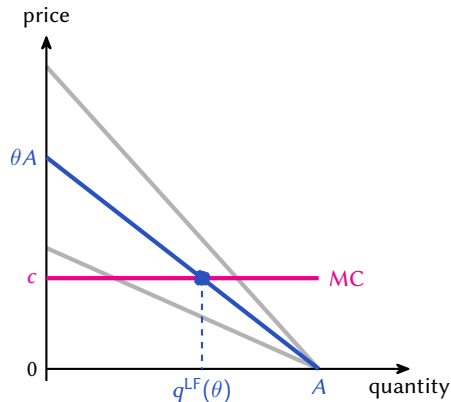
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- ▶ Assumption of constant MC can be relaxed.
 - Upward-sloping supply: Kang (2023).
Eqm. effects $\Rightarrow$ alt. redistribution channel.
 - **This paper:** participation constraints.



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- ▶ We focus on **in-kind** programs: $t(\cdot) \geq 0 \rightsquigarrow$ no lump-sum transfers to consumers.
However, we allow for lump-sum transfers to consumers “outside of the mechanism.”

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 - $\leadsto$ Monotonicity of ω captures the correlation between demand and redistributive priority.
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For any given mechanism (q, t) , the weighted total surplus can be written as:

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subject to

► incentive compatibility, $\theta \in \arg \max_{\hat{\theta} \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]} [\theta v(q(\hat{\theta})) - t(\hat{\theta})], \quad \forall \theta \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]; \quad (\text{IC})$

► no lump-sum transfers, $t(\theta) \geq 0, \quad \forall \theta \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]; \quad (\text{LS})$

► individual rationality, $\theta v(q(\theta)) - t(\theta) \geq U^{\text{LF}}(\theta), \quad \forall \theta \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]; \quad (\text{IR})$

► topping up, $q(\theta) \geq q^{\text{LF}}(\theta), \quad \forall \theta \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]. \quad (\text{TU})$

Related Work

- ▶ **Redistributive Mechanism Design.** Che, Gale and Kim (2013); Condorelli (2013); Dworczak (r) Kominers (r) Akbarpour (2021); Akbarpour (r) Dworczak (r) Kominers (2022); Akbarpour (r) Dworczak (r) Kominers (2024); Pai and Strack (2024).
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- ▶ **Methodological Tools in Mechanism Design.**
 - Generalized ironing: Toikka (2011).
 - Lagrangian approach: Amador, Werning and Angeletos (2006); Amador and Bagwell (2013).
 - Type-dependent outside options: Jullien (2000), Dworczak and Muir (2024).
 - Majorization constraints (in a concave program): Kleiner, Moldovanu and Strack (2021).
 - ~ **This paper:** majorization constraints due to type-dependent outside options (in a convex program).

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Main Results:

① **When to optimally redistribute?** (*extensive-margin differences*).

N + S conditions for intervention $\rightsquigarrow$ topping up reduces the scope for screening.

② **How to optimally redistribute?** (*intensive-margin differences*).

Overview of Main Results

Question. How does topping up affect the optimal design of redistribution programs?

Main Results:

① **When to optimally redistribute?** (*extensive-margin differences*).

$N + S$ conditions for intervention $\rightsquigarrow$ topping up reduces the scope for screening.

② **How to optimally redistribute?** (*intensive-margin differences*).

$N + S$ conditions for optimal mechanisms to coincide $\rightsquigarrow$ topping up distorts screening.

① When to Optimally Redistribute?

Theorem 1. The optimal mechanism strictly improves on the laissez-faire outcome iff:

$$\begin{cases} \max \omega > \alpha, & \text{if topping up is not allowed,} \\ \max_{\hat{\theta} \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]} \mathbf{E} \left[\omega(\theta) \mid \theta \geq \hat{\theta} \right] > \alpha, & \text{if topping up is allowed.} \end{cases}$$

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Special cases:

- **Equal-weight benchmark.** If $\omega \equiv \alpha$, laissez-faire is optimal (First Welfare Theorem).

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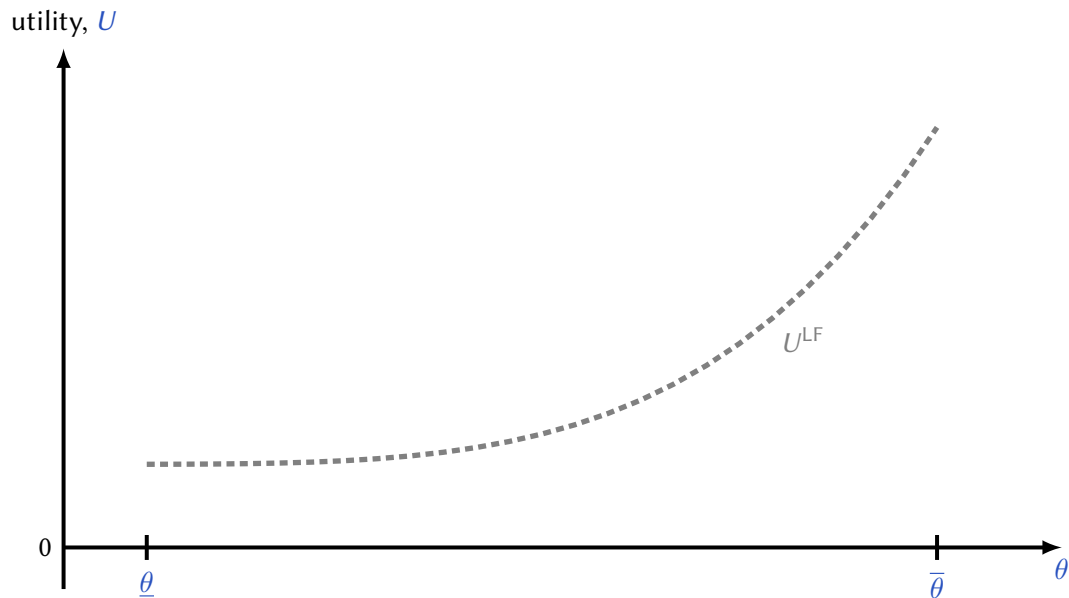
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- ▶ **Negative correlation.** If ω is decreasing, $\max_{\hat{\theta} \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]} \mathbf{E}[\omega(\theta) \mid \theta \geq \hat{\theta}] = \mathbf{E}[\omega] < \max \omega$.

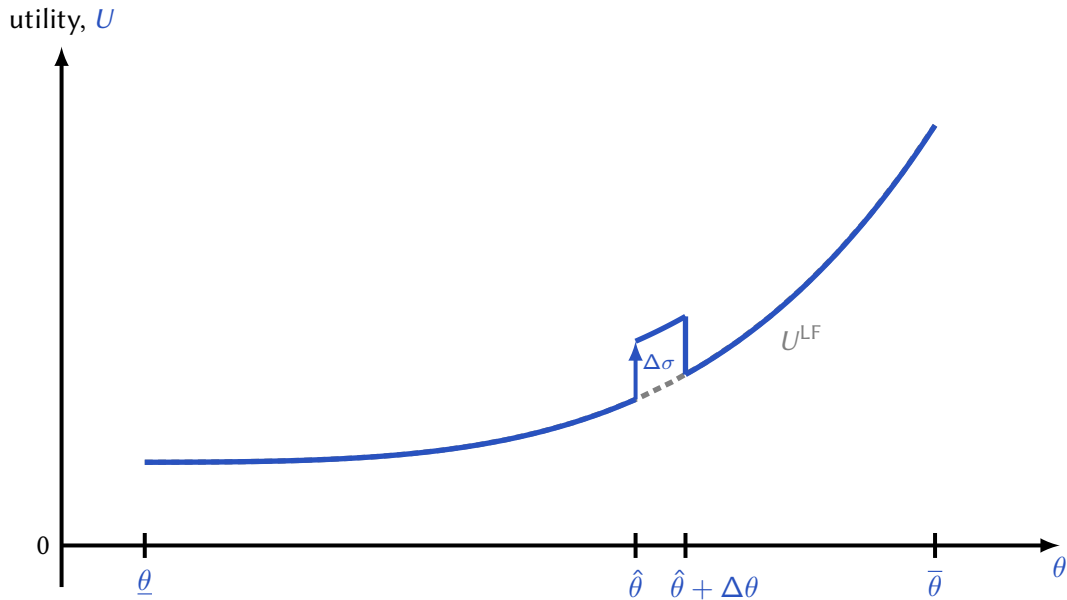
Proof Sketch of Theorem 1



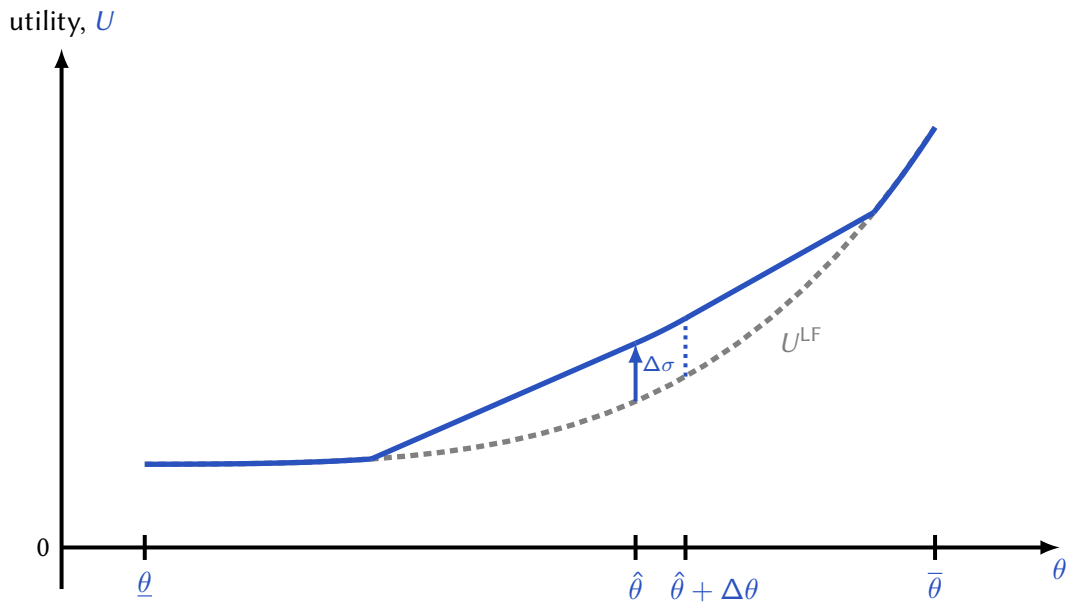
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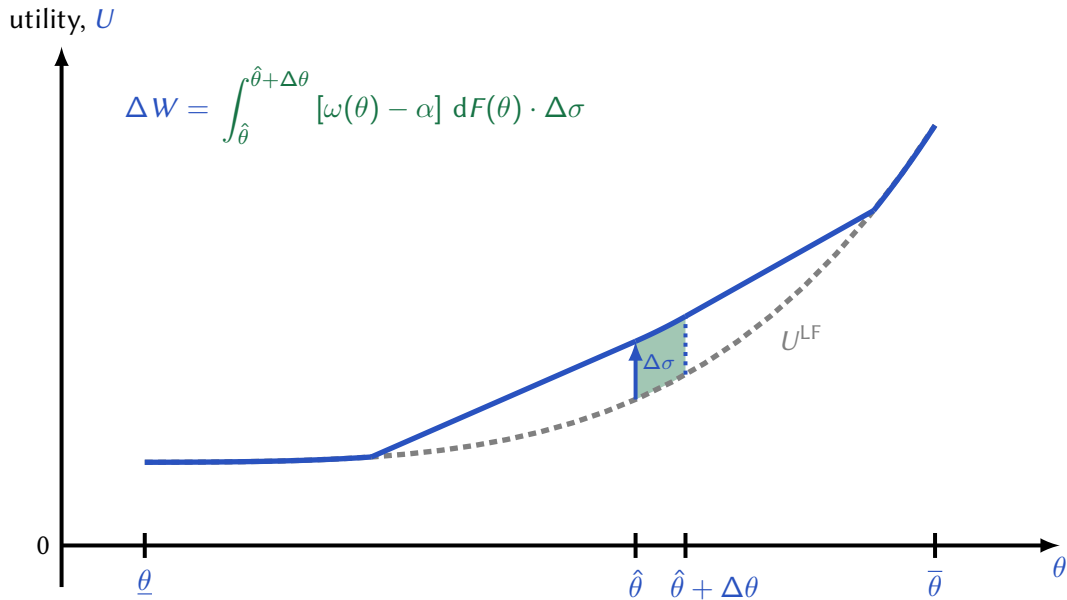
Proof Sketch of Theorem 1: No Topping Up



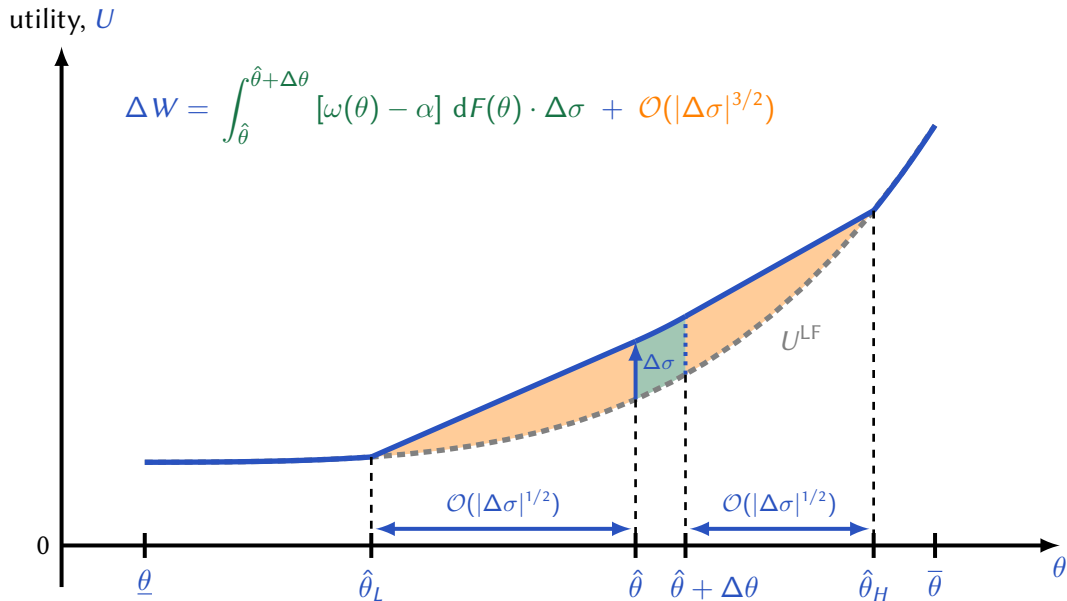
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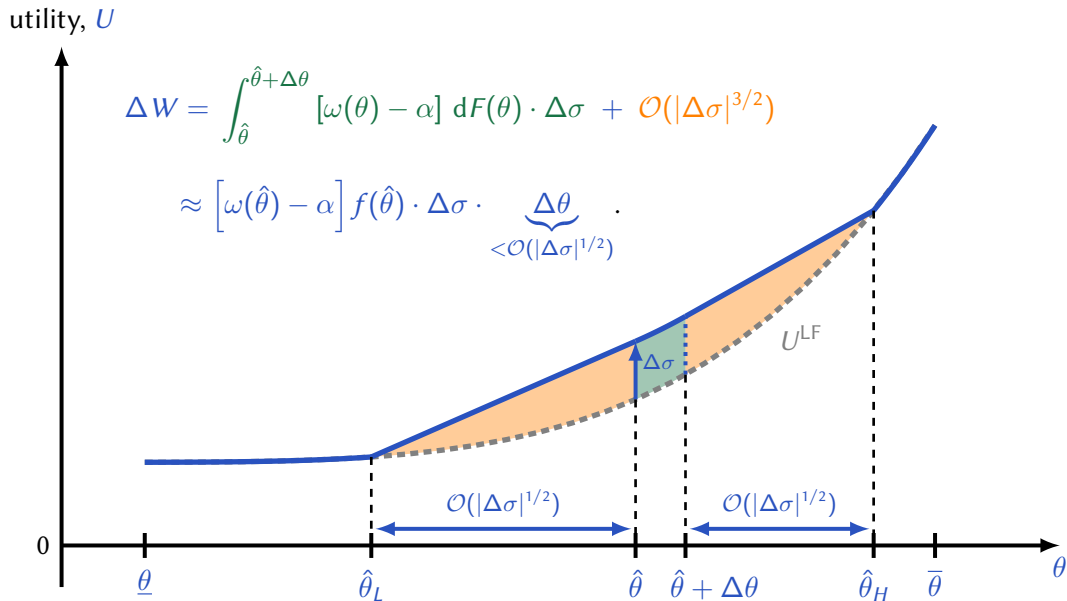
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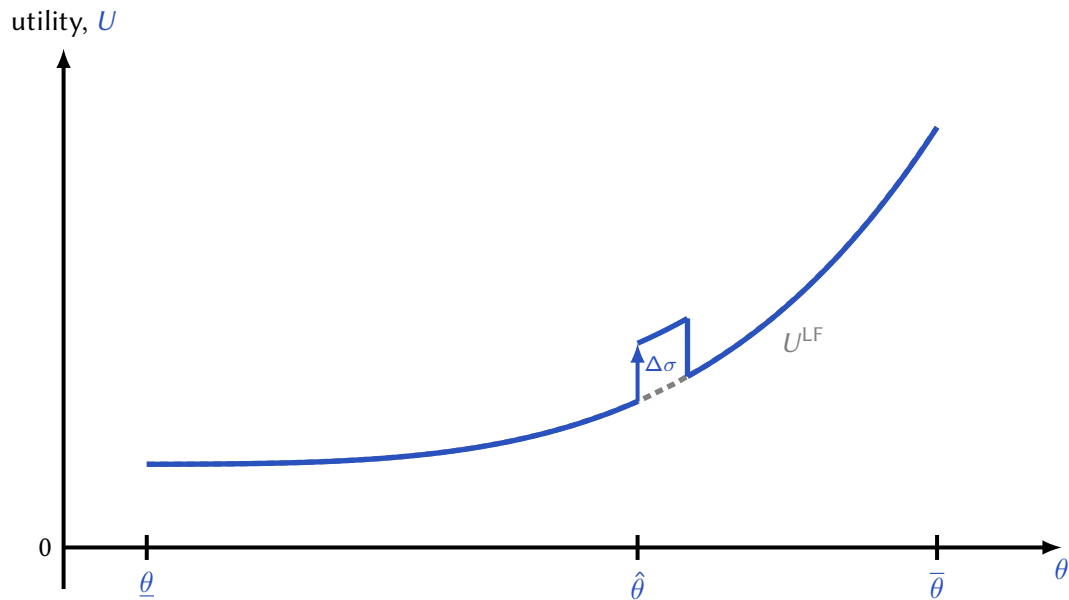
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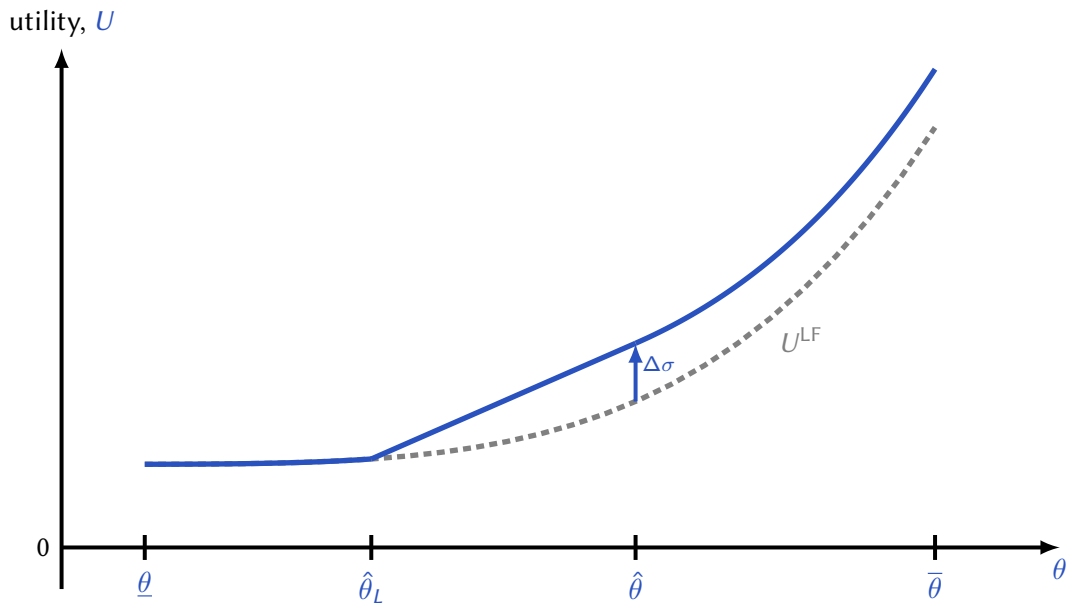
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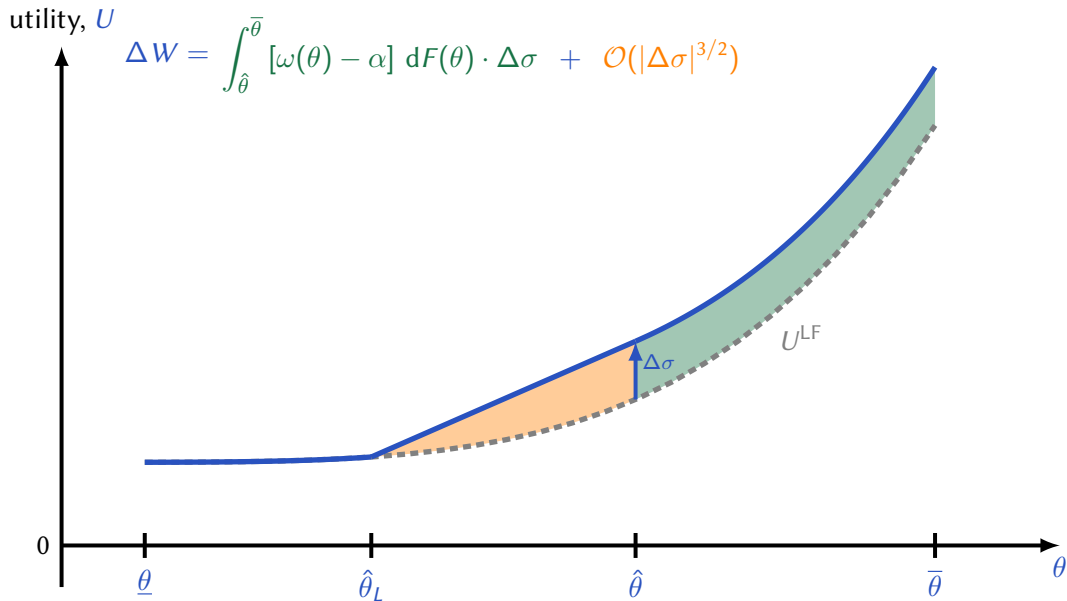
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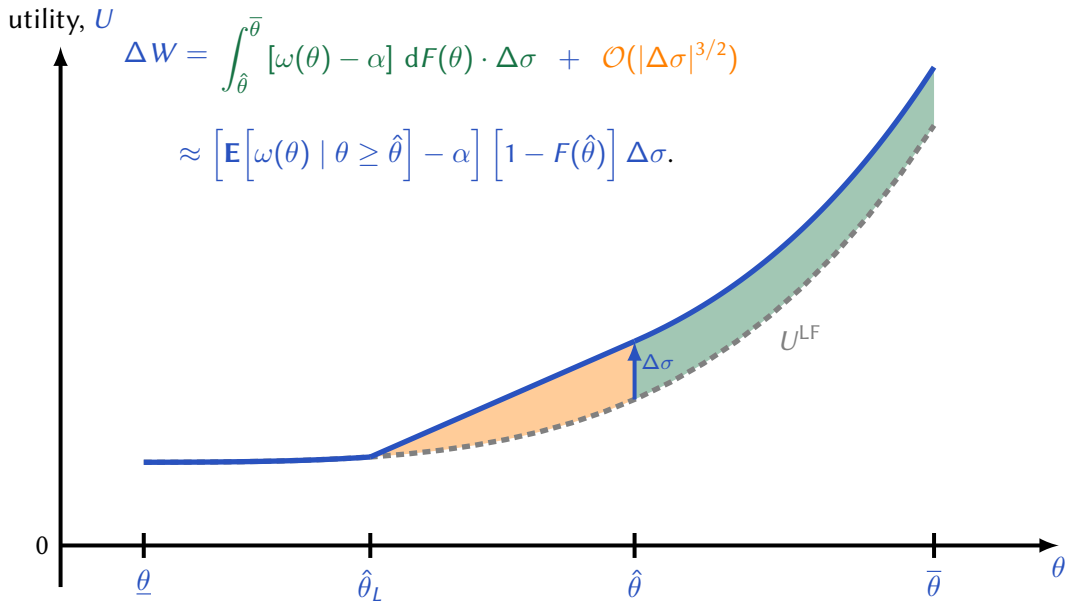
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Corollary. Topping up changes intervention decision iff $\max \omega > \alpha \geq \max_{\hat{\theta}} \mathbf{E}[\omega(\theta) \mid \theta \geq \hat{\theta}]$.

② How to Optimally Redistribute?

Theorem 2. Define

$$J_{\mu}(\theta) := \theta + \frac{\mu \underline{\theta} \cdot \delta_{\underline{\theta}}(\theta) - \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\bar{\theta}} [\alpha - \omega(s)] dF(s)}{\alpha f(\theta)} \quad \text{and} \quad \theta^L := \min \left\{ \hat{\theta} \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}] : \int_{\hat{\theta}}^{\bar{\theta}} [\omega(s) - \alpha] dF(s) \geq 0 \right\}.$$

Let $\mu^* := (\mathbf{E}[\omega] - \alpha)_+$. The optimal mechanism with and without topping up coincide iff:

$$\begin{cases} \overline{J_{\mu^*}|_{[\theta^L, \bar{\theta}]}} \geq \theta, & \text{for all } \theta^L \leq \theta \leq \bar{\theta}, \\ \omega(\theta) \leq \alpha, & \text{for all } \underline{\theta} \leq \theta < \theta^L. \end{cases}$$

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Topping up can distort screening on the intensive margin, even conditional on intervention.

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Topping up can distort screening on the intensive margin, even conditional on intervention.

Next: how topping up affects **optimal redistribution** for positive vs. negative correlation.

Optimal Mechanisms: Positive Correlation

Theorem 3. When correlation is positive (i.e., ω is increasing), topping up **does not affect** optimal redistribution: the optimal mechanisms with and without topping up coincide.

Intuition:

- ▶ Optimal mechanism distorts consumption $\uparrow$ for consumers with high θ (= high ω).
- ▶ This is “well-targeted”: benefits accrue to consumers with even higher θ (= higher ω).
- ▶ If not for topping up, the social planner would provide the “topped-up” units herself.

Optimal Mechanisms: Positive Correlation

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Examples: childcare, disability care, public transit, basic staples like coarse bread/cassava.

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The *Public Expenditure Handbook* published by the IMF recommends that:

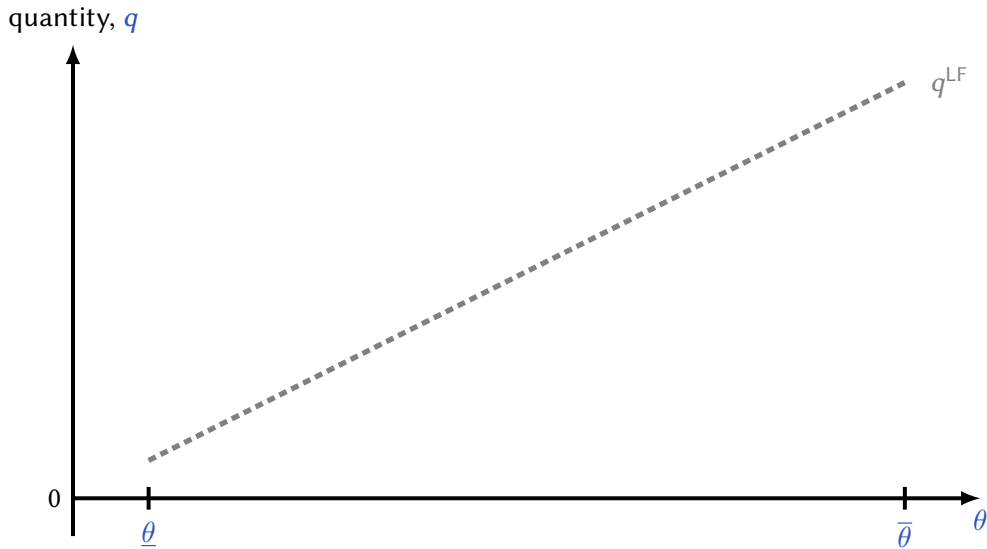
“[m]arketed goods with a negative income elasticity (i.e., inferior goods) are ideal candidates for a redistributive subsidy.”

Theorem 3 complements the “self-targeting” explanation: no need to prevent topping up.

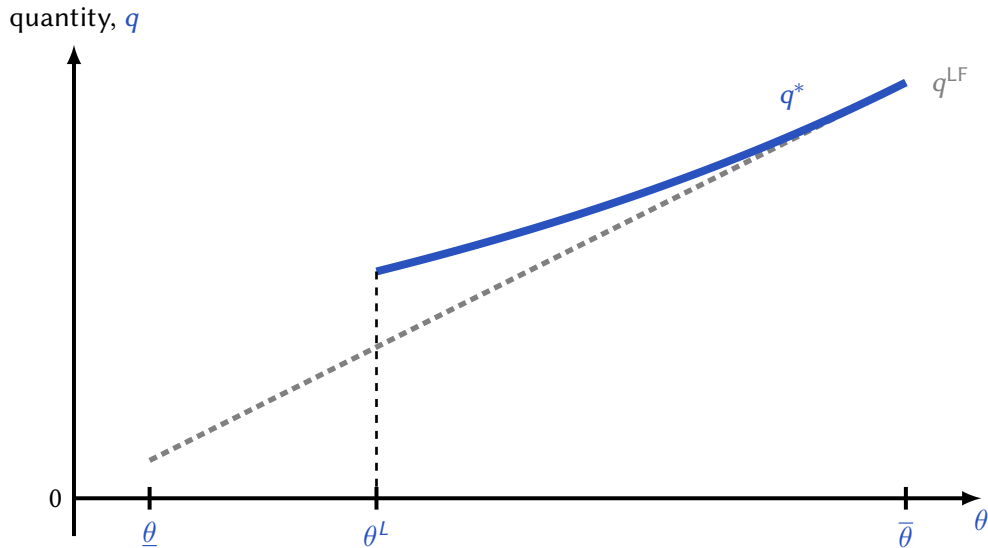
Characterization of Optimal Mechanisms: $E[\omega] > \alpha$



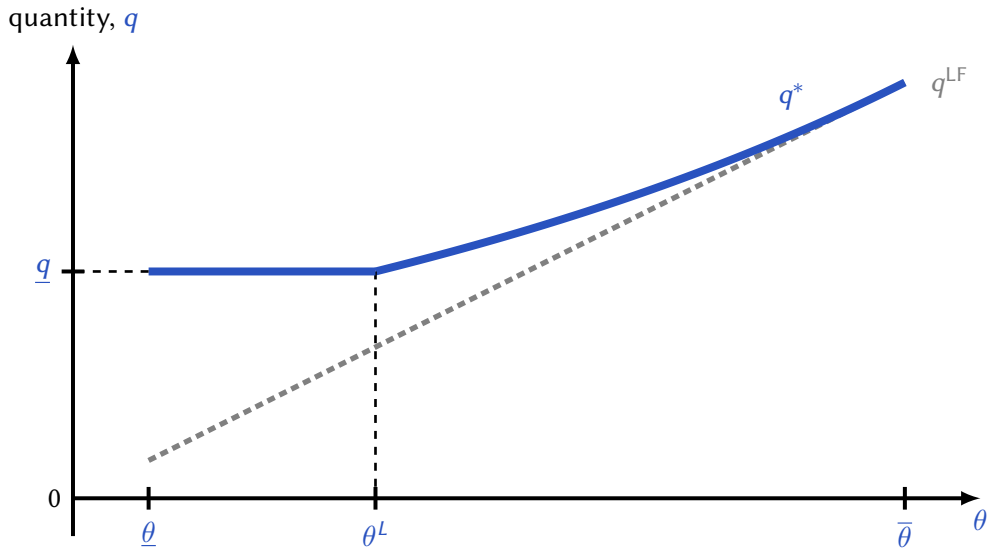
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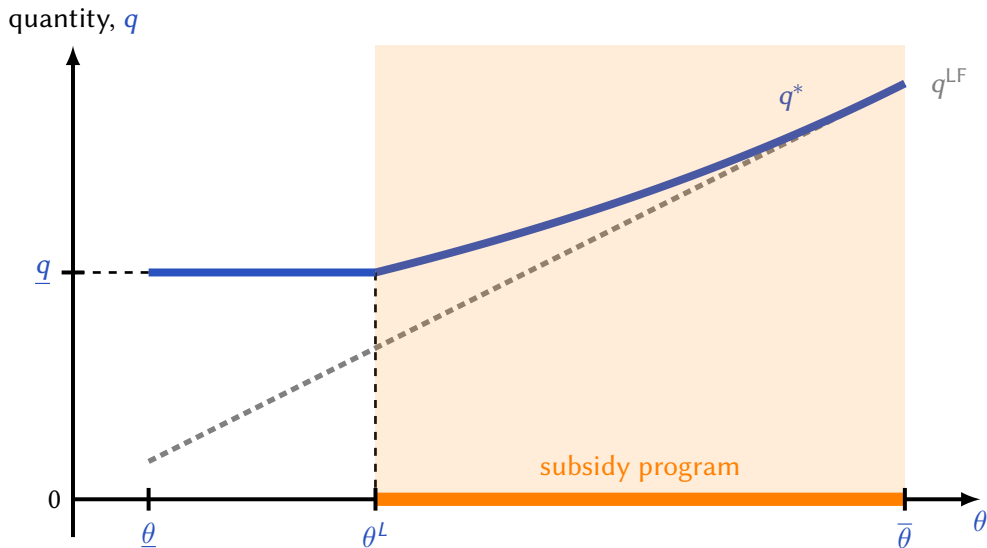
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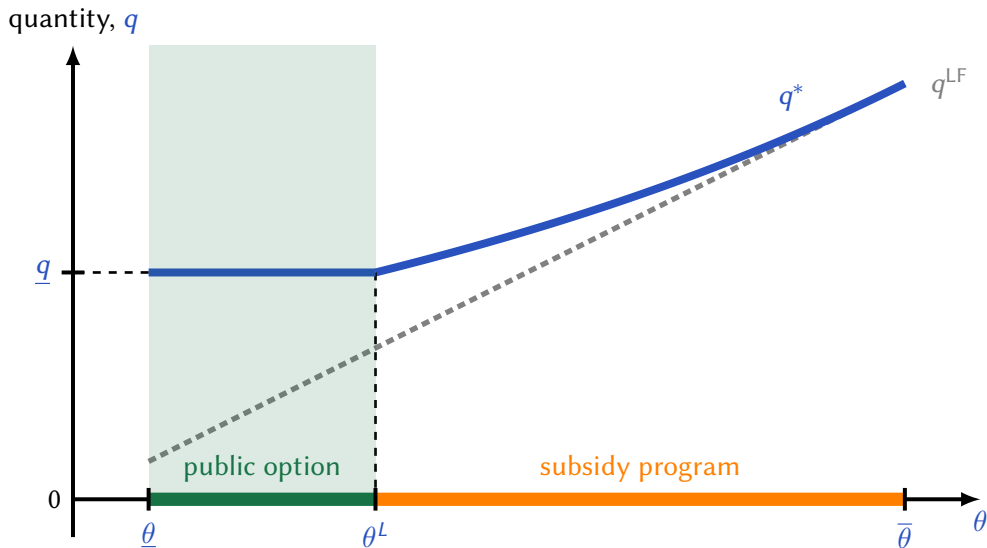
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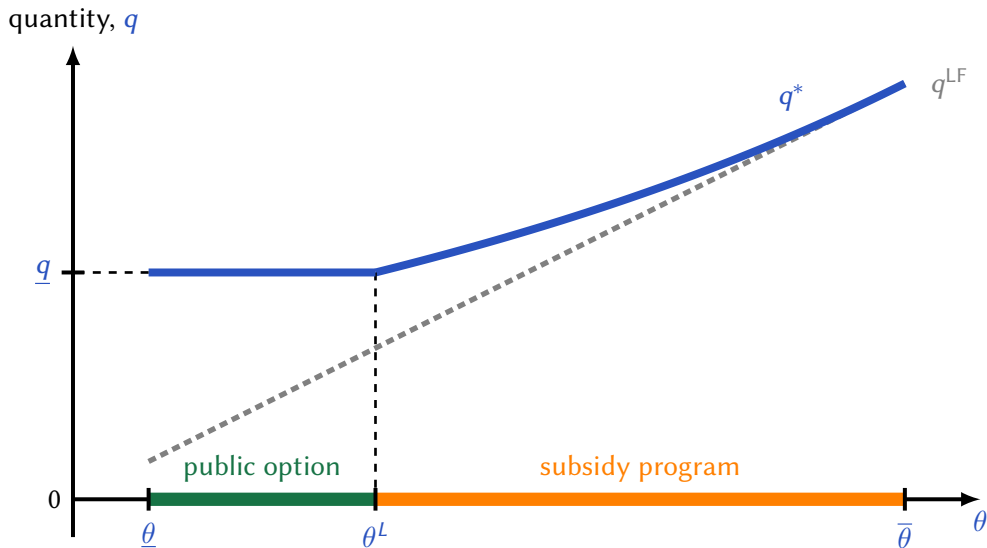
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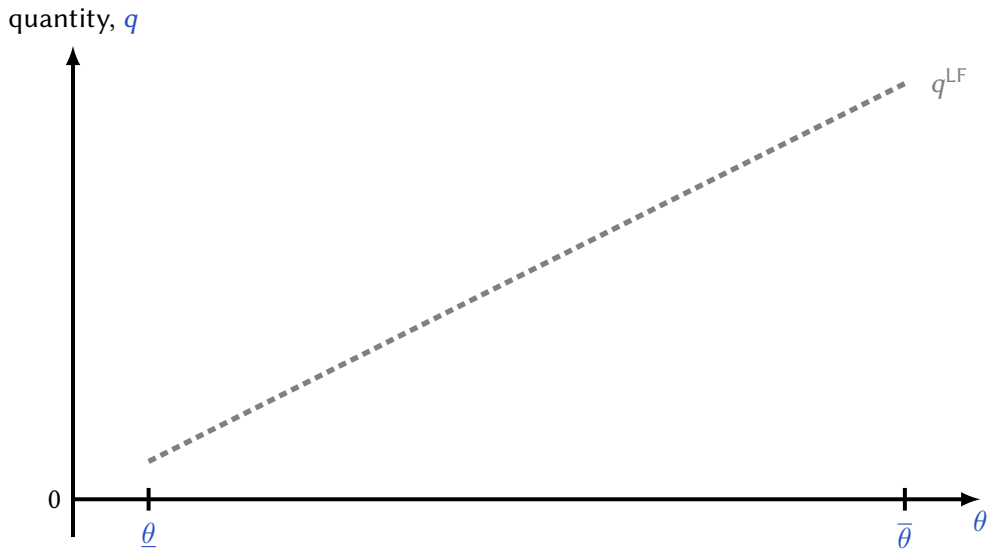
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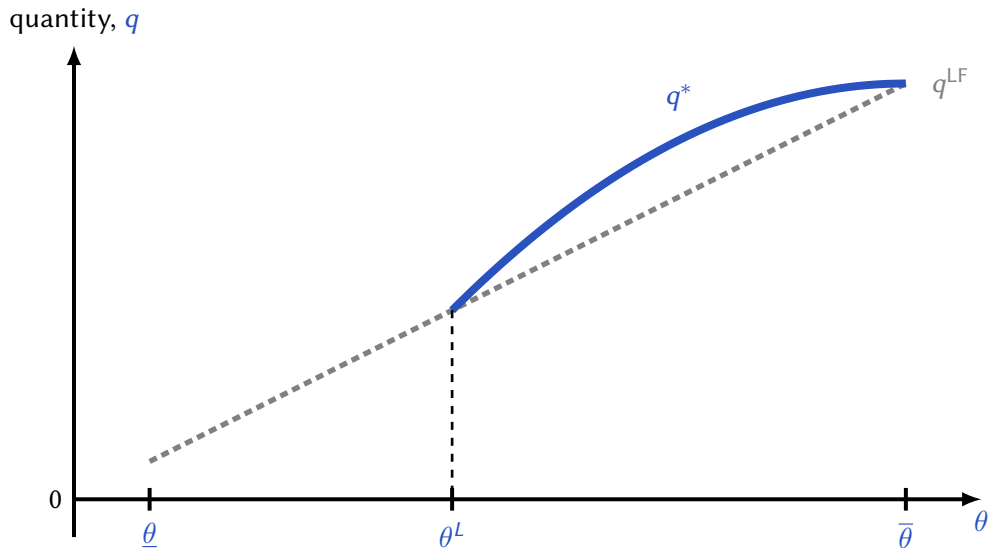
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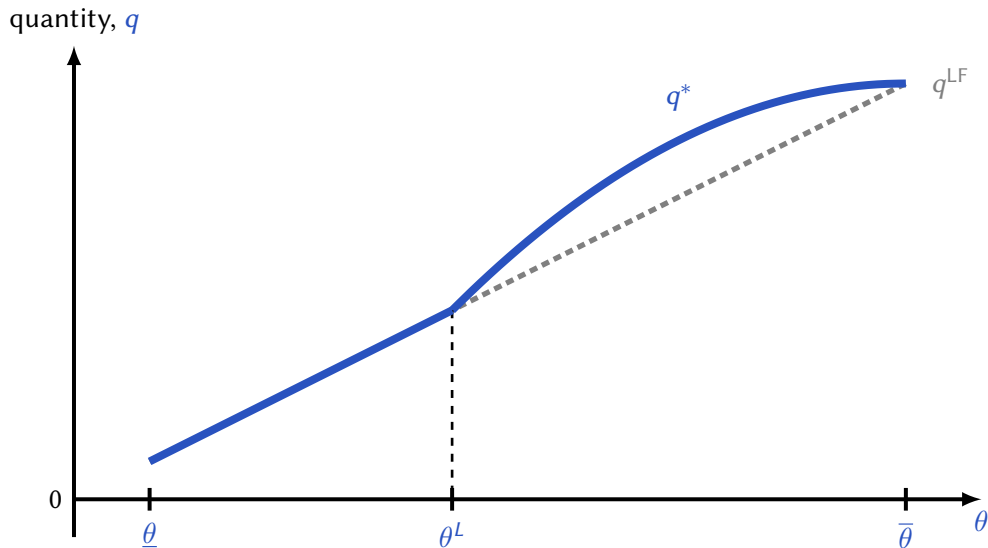
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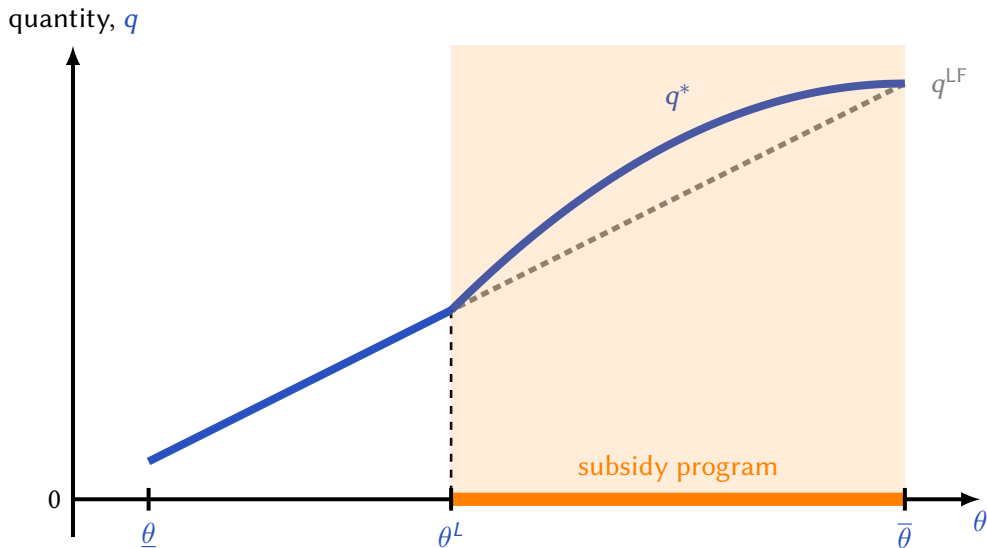
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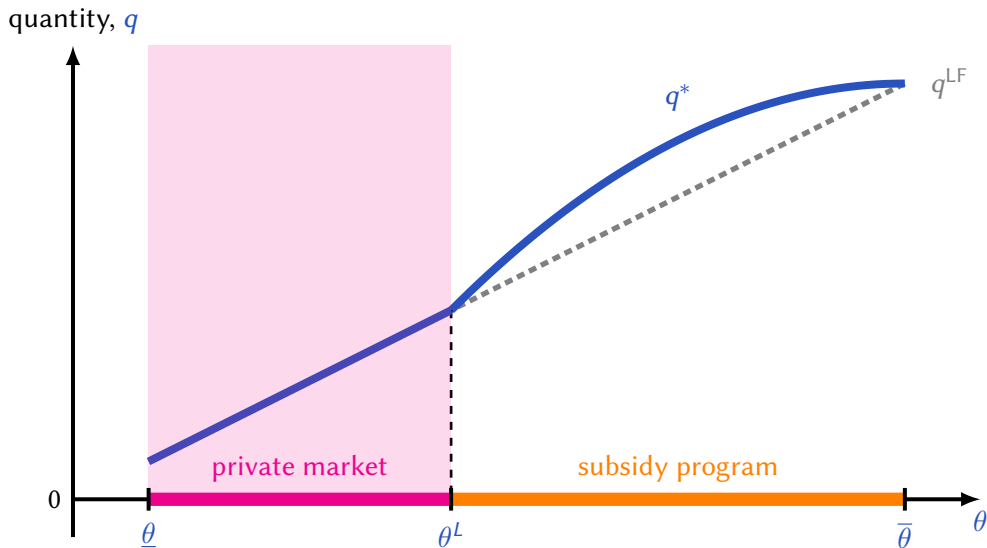
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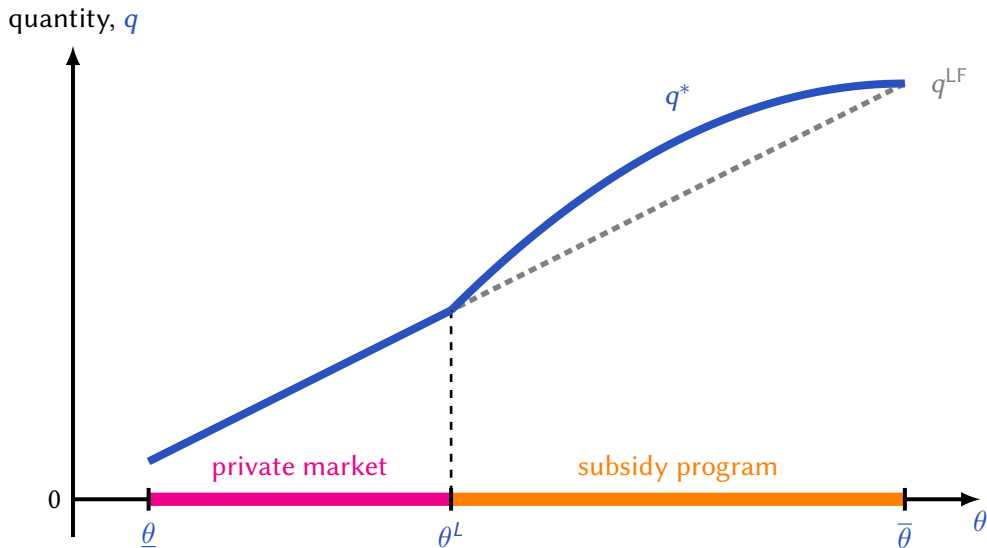
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If $E[\omega] > \alpha$:  demand

If $E[\omega] \leq \alpha$:  demand

Optimal Mechanisms: Positive Correlation

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In particular, for any $\mu \geq 0$, define

$$q_\mu(\theta) := D(c, \overline{J}_\mu(\theta)), \quad \text{where } \overline{J}_\mu(\theta) := \theta + \frac{\mu \underline{\theta} \cdot \delta_{\underline{\theta}}(\theta) - \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\overline{\theta}} [\alpha - \omega(s)] dF(s)}{\alpha f(\theta)}.$$

Moreover, denote

$$\theta^L := \min \left\{ \hat{\theta} \in [\underline{\theta}, \overline{\theta}] : \int_{\hat{\theta}}^{\overline{\theta}} [\omega(s) - \alpha] dF(s) \geq 0 \right\}.$$

Let $\mu^* := (\mathbf{E}[\omega] - \alpha)_+$. Then the optimal allocation function is

$$q^*(\theta) = \begin{cases} q_{\mu^*}(\theta) & \text{for } \theta_L \leq \theta \leq \overline{\theta}, \\ q^{\text{LF}}(\theta) & \text{for } \underline{\theta} \leq \theta < \theta^L. \end{cases}$$

Proof Sketch of Theorem 3: Overview

We prove **Theorem 3** in three steps:

- #1. Apply basic mechanism design tools $\rightsquigarrow$ constrained mechanism design.
- #2. Show that no topping up (IR) constraint binds for lowest type $\underline{\theta}$.
- #3. Guess and verify optimal Lagrange multipliers for all other (IR) constraints.
Check that the optimal mechanism also satisfies topping up (TU) constraints.

► skip ahead

Step #1: Applying Basic Mechanism Design Tools

The social planner maximizes weighted total surplus:

$$\max_{(q,t)} \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\bar{\theta}} \left[\omega(\theta) \underbrace{[\theta v(q(\theta)) - t(\theta)]}_{\text{consumer surplus}} + \alpha \underbrace{[t(\theta) - cq(\theta)]}_{\text{total profit}} \right] dF(\theta),$$

subject to (IC), (LS), and (IR).

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Claim 1 (Myerson, 1981; Milgrom and Segal, 2002). A mechanism (q, t) satisfies (IC) if and only if q is nondecreasing and

$$\theta v(q(\theta)) - t(\theta) = \underbrace{\underline{\theta} v(q(\underline{\theta})) - t(\underline{\theta})}_{=U} + \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\theta} v(q(s)) ds,$$

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subject to (IR), with the change of variables $\nu(\theta) = \nu(q(\theta))$.

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subject to

$$\underbrace{\underline{U} + \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\theta} \nu(s) ds}_{=\theta \nu(\theta) - t(\theta)} \geq \underbrace{\underline{U}^{\text{LF}} + \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\theta} \nu^{\text{LF}}(s) ds}_{=U^{\text{LF}}(\theta)}, \quad \forall \theta \in [\underline{\theta}, \bar{\theta}]. \quad (\text{IR})$$

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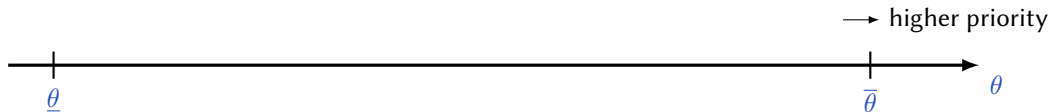
Interpretation: If (IR) binds for some open interval of types (which implies that $\nu = \nu^{\text{LF}}$), then those consumers consume in private market; we say that private market is “active.”

Step #2: No Topping Up and Binding (IR) Constraints

Lemma 1. If the private market is active, then the (IR) constraint binds for the lowest type $\underline{\theta}$.

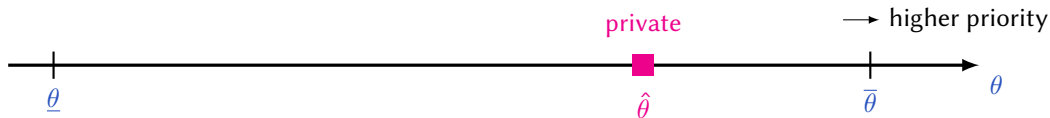
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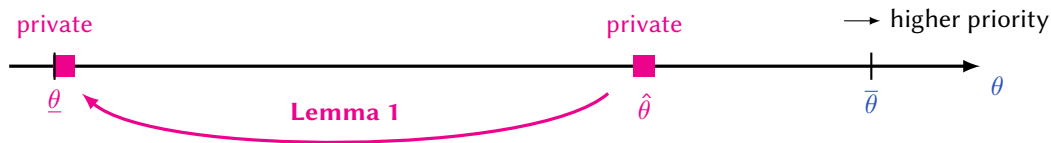
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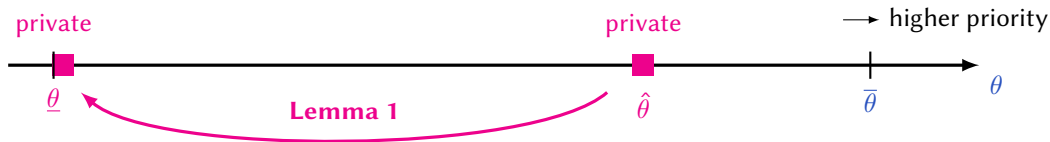
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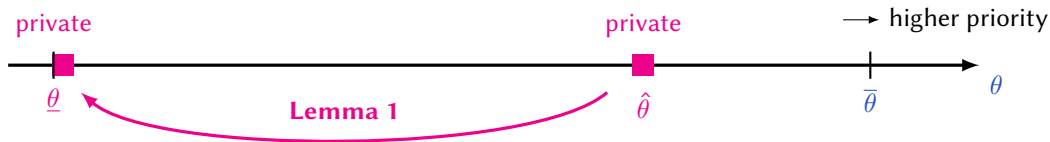
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Intuition: The social planner has no incentive to subsidize the lowest priority consumer $\underline{\theta}$ if she already does not subsidize a positive measure of relatively higher priority consumers.

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Lemma 2. If the private market is inactive, then the (IR) constraint might bind only for $\underline{\theta}$.

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The social planner maximizes weighted total surplus:

$$\max_{\substack{\underline{U} \leq \underline{\theta} \nu(\underline{\theta}), \\ \nu \text{ nondecreasing}}} \left\{ [\mathbf{E}[\omega] - \alpha] \underline{U} + \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\bar{\theta}} \left[\left[\alpha \theta - \frac{\int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\bar{\theta}} [\alpha - \omega(s)] dF(s)}{f(\theta)} \right] \nu(\theta) - \alpha c \nu^{-1}(\nu(\theta)) \right] dF(\theta) \right\},$$

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Given that (IR) binds for lowest type $\underline{\theta}$ (cf. **Lemmas 1** and **2**), $\underline{U} = \underline{U}^{\text{LF}}$.

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The social planner maximizes weighted total surplus:

$$\max_{\substack{U \leq \underline{\theta} \nu(\underline{\theta}), \\ \nu \text{ nondecreasing}}} \left\{ [\mathbf{E}[\omega] - \alpha] \underline{U} + \int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\bar{\theta}} \left[\left[\alpha \theta - \frac{\int_{\underline{\theta}}^{\bar{\theta}} [\alpha - \omega(s)] dF(s)}{f(\theta)} \right] \nu(\theta) - \alpha c \nu^{-1}(\nu(\theta)) \right] dF(\theta) \right\},$$

subject to a **majorization** (second-order stochastic dominance) constraint,

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Technical difficulty: ν is strictly concave, so solution is generally an interior point.

Step #3: Guessing Lagrange Multipliers for (IR) Constraints

To overcome this technical difficulty, we adapt approach of [Amador and Bagwell \(2013\)](#):

- #1. Guess a continuum of optimal Lagrange multipliers for (IR) constraints.
- #2. Solve for optimal mechanism and verify that (IR) constraints are satisfied.
- #3. Verify that complementary slackness conditions are satisfied.

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This allows us to obtain the optimal mechanism with no topping up (**Theorem 3**).

With positive correlation, optimal mechanism also satisfies topping up (IR) constraints.

[With negative correlation, repeat the above approach with topping up (IR) constraints.]

Optimal Mechanisms: Negative Correlation

Theorem 4(a). When correlation is negative (i.e., ω is decreasing), topping up **does not affect** the optimal subsidy program if $\alpha \geq \max \omega$ or $\alpha \leq \min \omega$.

Intuition: If $\alpha \leq \min \omega$, distort consumption $\uparrow$ for all consumers.



Optimal Mechanisms: Negative Correlation

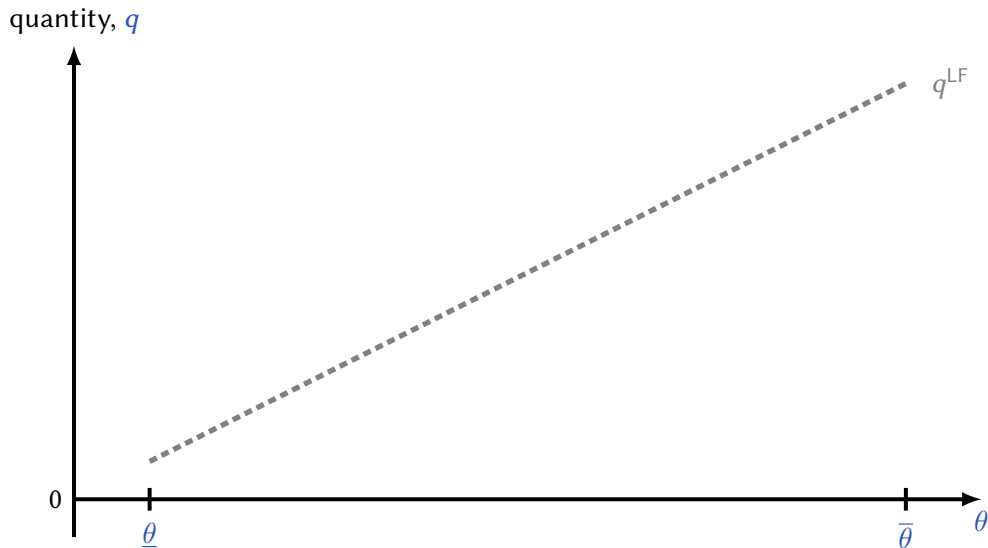
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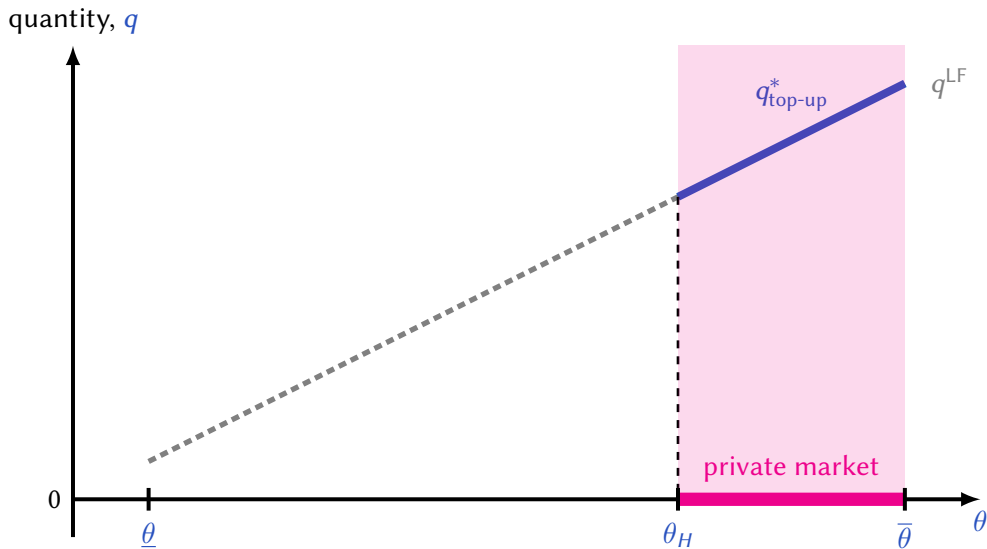


Theorem 4(b). When correlation is negative, there exists $\alpha_{\min} \in [\min \omega, E[\omega]]$ such that topping up **does affect** the optimal subsidy program iff $\alpha_{\min} < \alpha < \max \omega$.

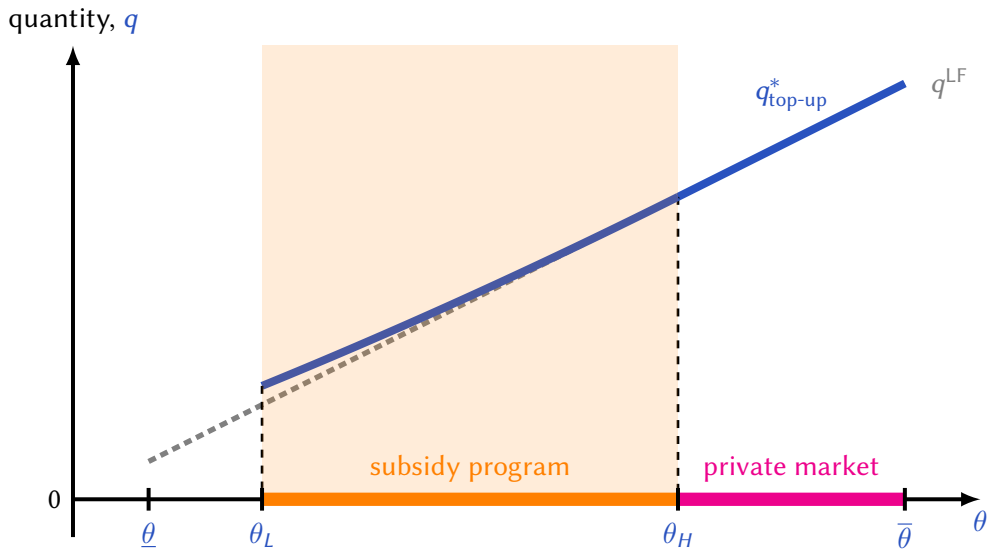
Characterization of Optimal Mechanisms: $\alpha_{\min} < \alpha < \mathbf{E}[\omega]$



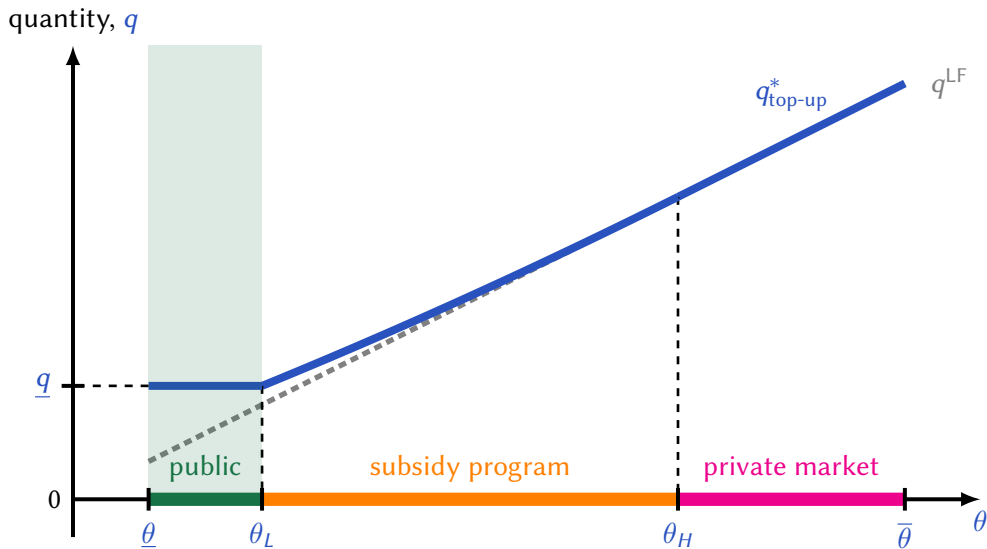
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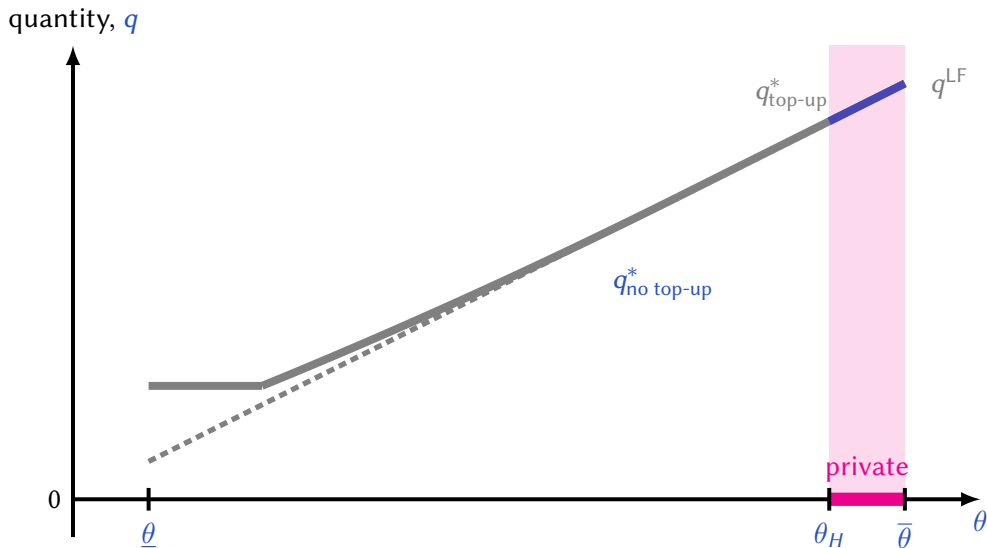
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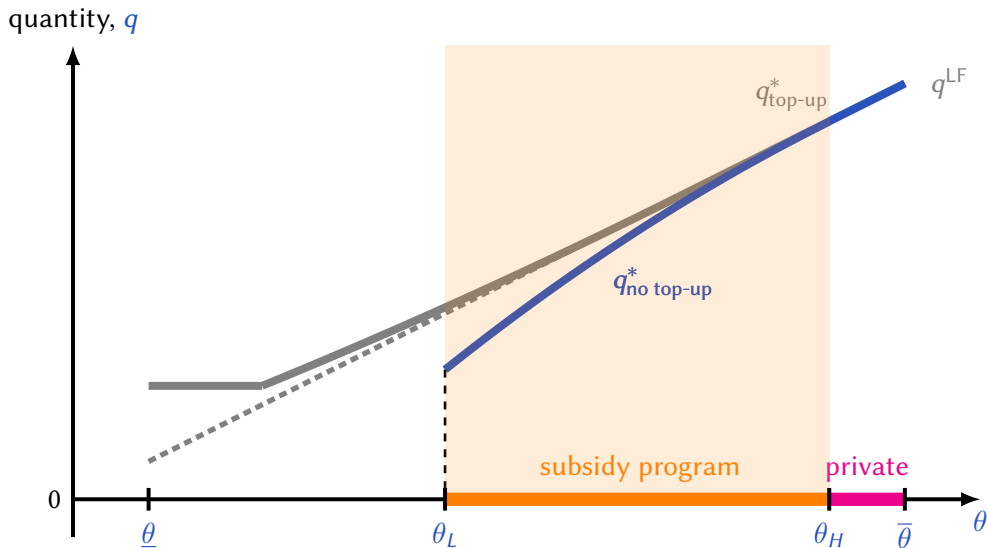
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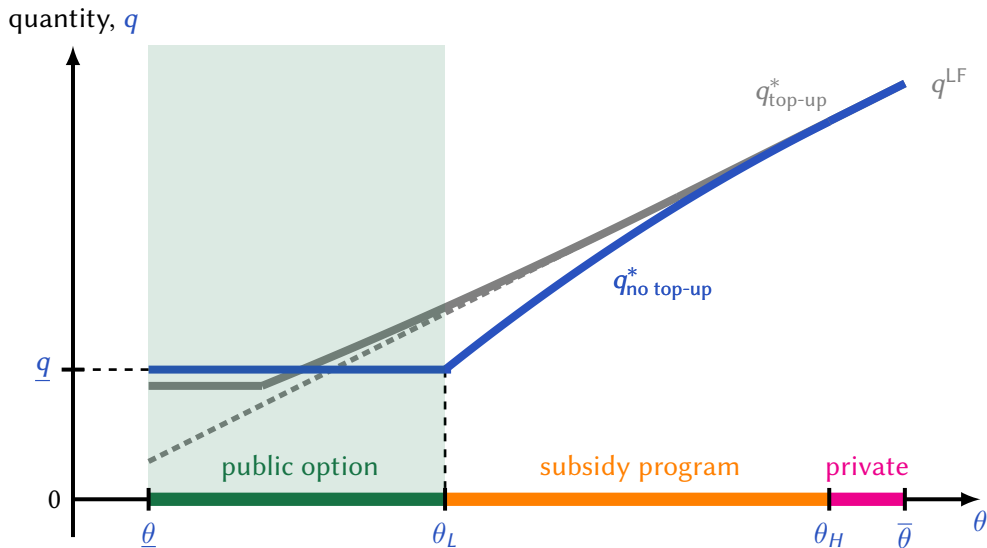
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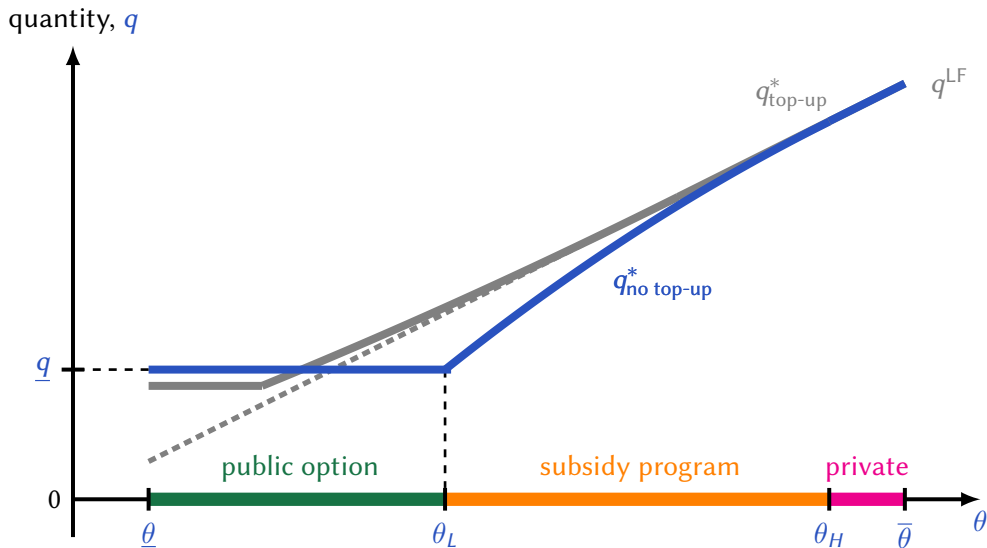
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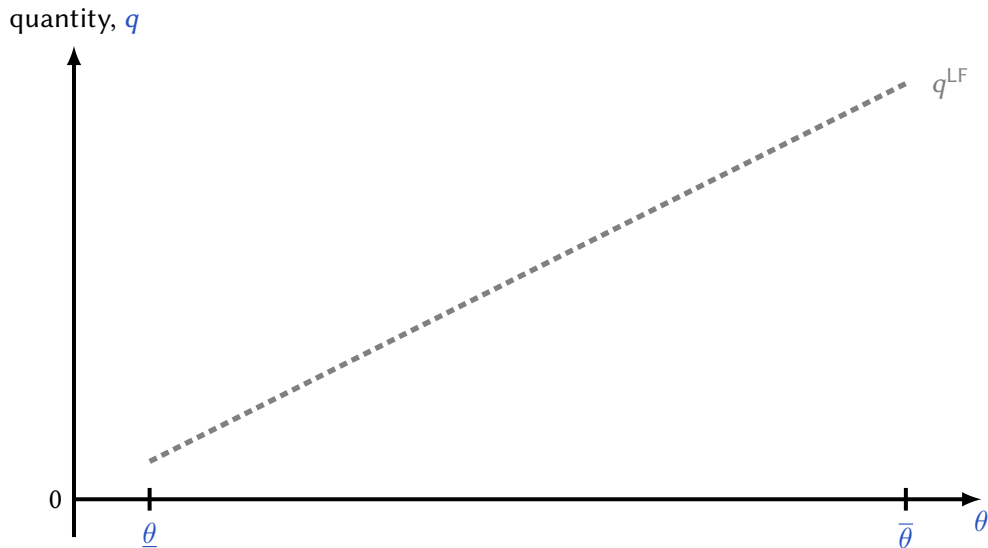
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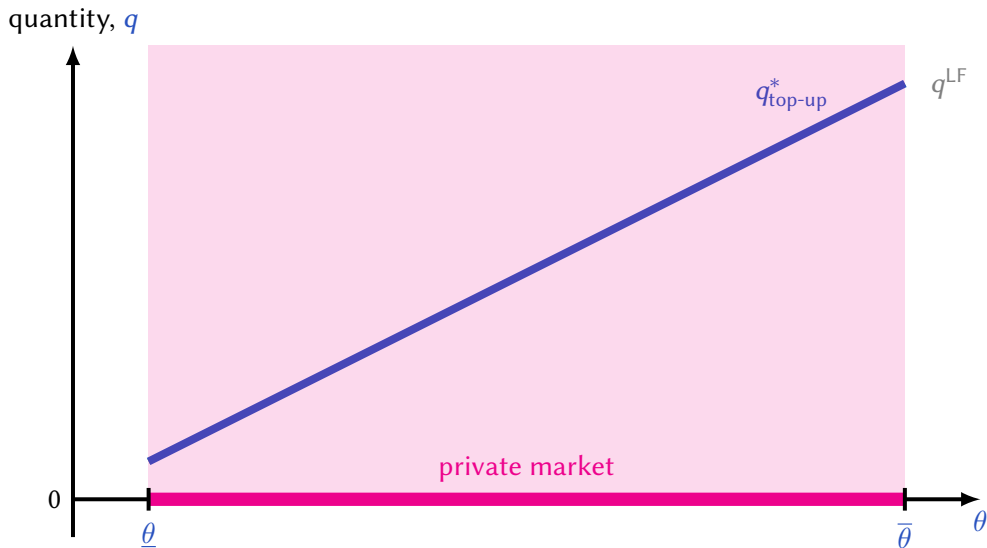
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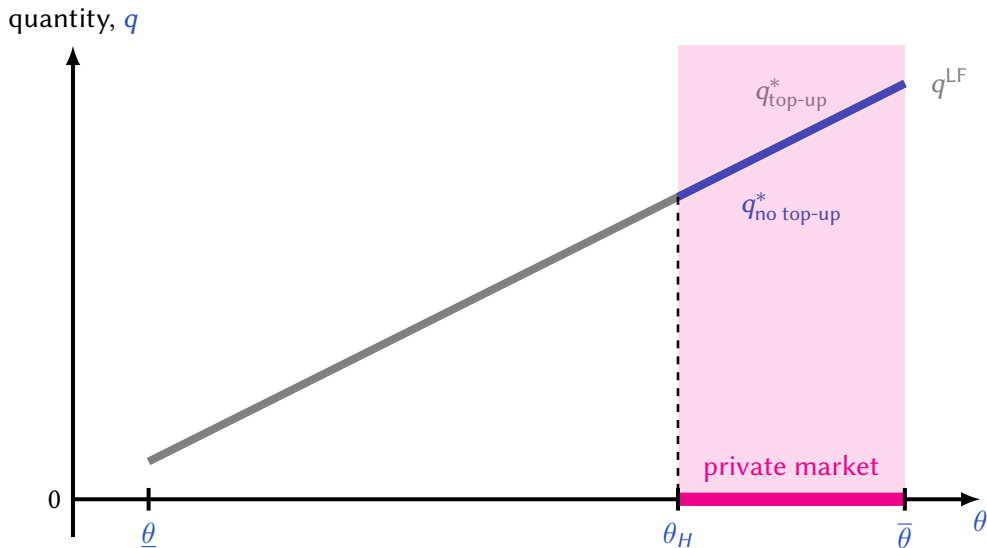
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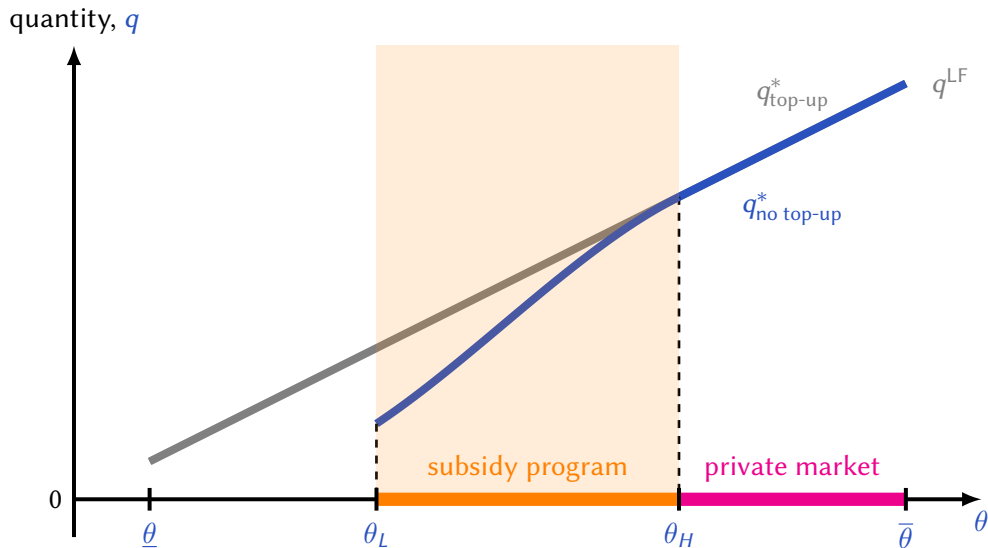
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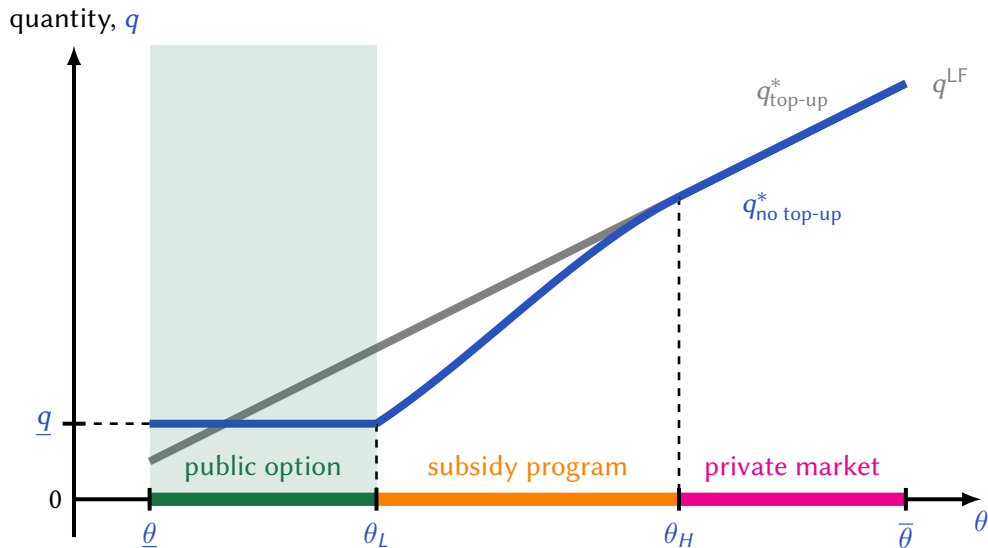
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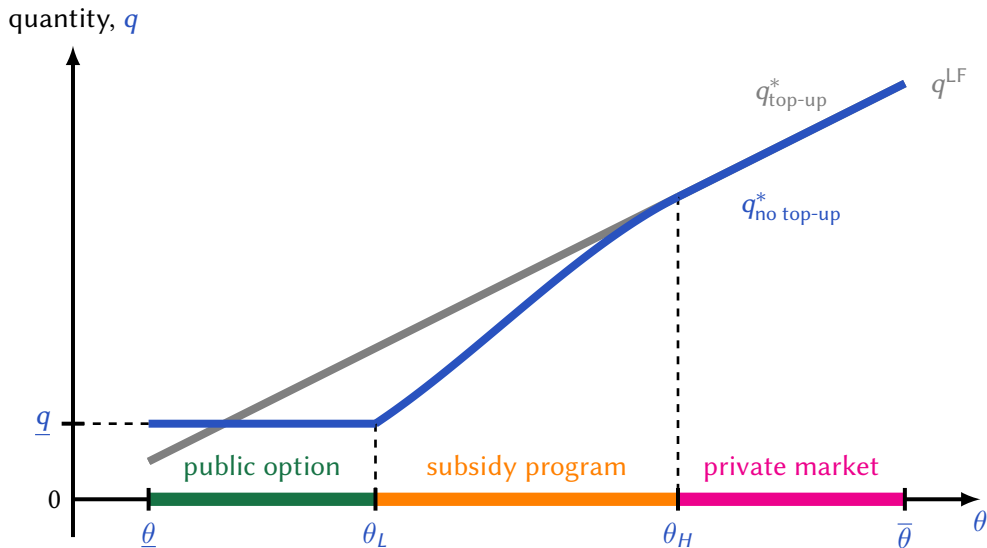
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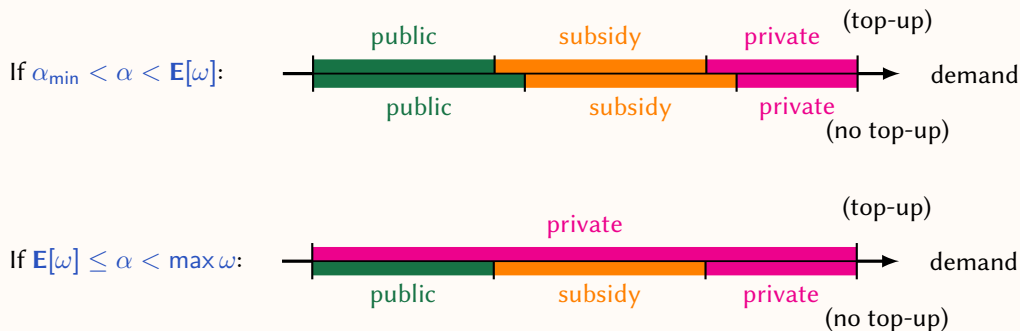


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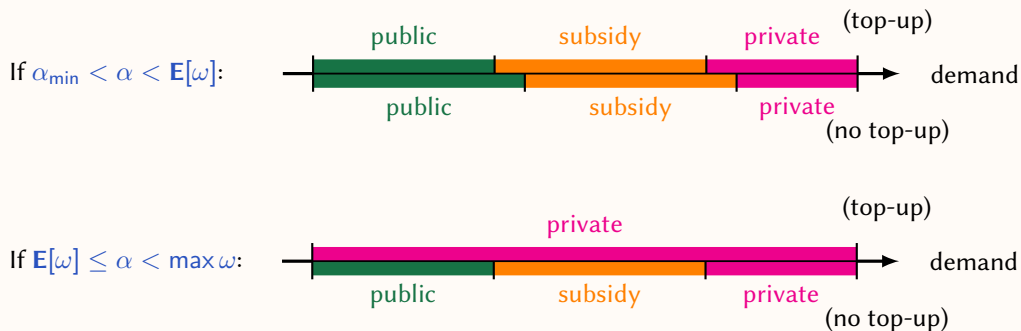
Optimal Mechanisms: Negative Correlation

Theorem 4. When correlation is negative (i.e., ω is decreasing), there exists $\alpha_{\min} \in [\min \omega, \mathbf{E}[\omega]]$ such that topping up **affects** optimal redistribution if and only if $\alpha_{\min} < \alpha < \max \omega$.



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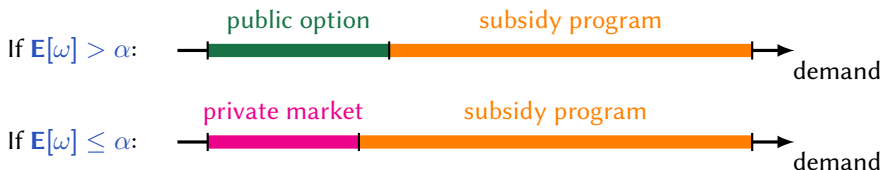
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Topping up expands the use of the private market and reduces the use of a free public option.

Summary

- ① Topping up reduces the social planner's scope for screening.
- ② Topping up can distort screening even conditional on intervention.
- ③ When correlation is positive, optimal mechanisms coincide:



- ④ When correlation is negative, optimal mechanisms differ iff $\alpha \in (\alpha_{\min}, \max \omega)$:
 - Ⓐ Topping up rotates consumption away from high priority consumers.
 - Ⓑ Topping up expands the use of the private market.
 - Ⓒ Topping up reduces the use of a free public option.

Discussion

Concluding Remarks

Redistribution programs often operate alongside (or within) private markets.

This leads to two challenges for optimal design:

- ▶ equilibrium effects; and
- ▶ (type-dependent) outside options.

This talk: how do these challenges affect optimal redistribution?

Future Work

#1. Imperfectly competitive private markets

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- **Equilibrium:** Mekonnen (2025); Mäkimattila (ongoing).
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- **Other issues:** market structure, information structure, other frictions, ...

#2. Instrument choice

- **Simple instrument:** free public option.
- **Rich instruments:** nonlinear subsidies.
- **Something in between?**

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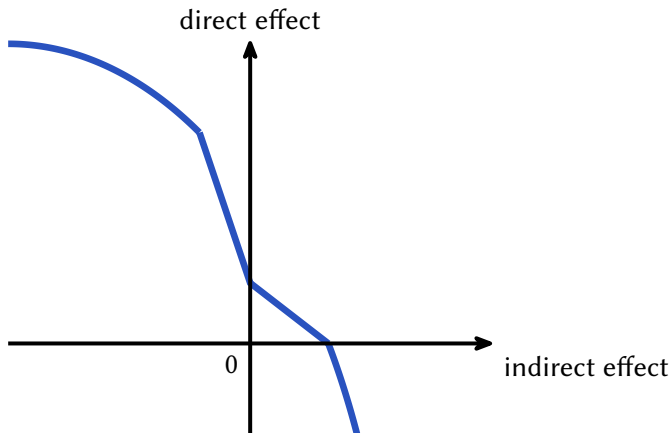
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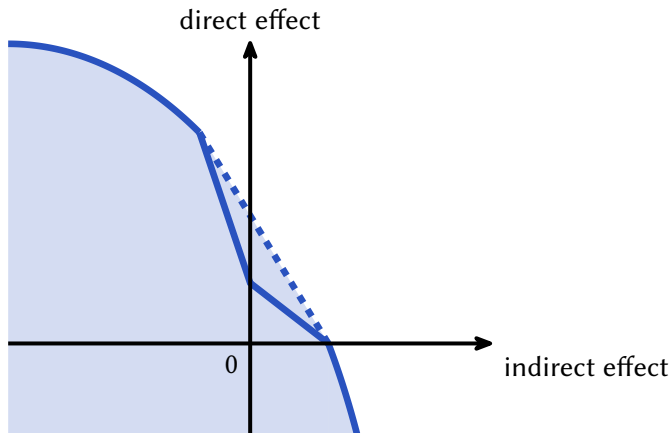
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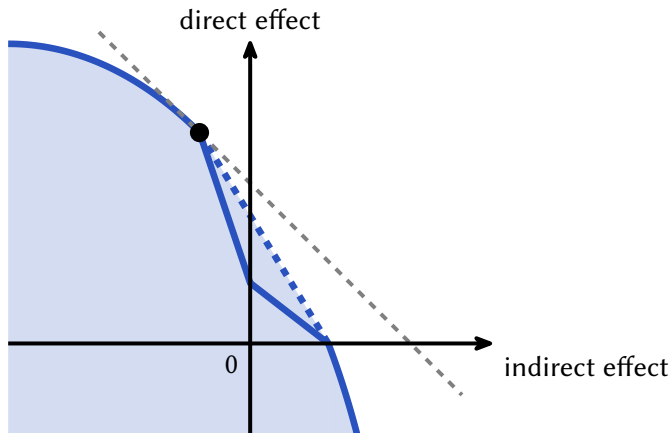
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