

Public Abstract

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Title:What Determines Vote Share in City Council Elections? The Incumbent Advantage and Economic Voting

While the literature about local elections has been increasing in recent years, it still is wanting for more research on what variables influence the election of local legislators. Though some have begun examining the relationship between electoral success and incumbency, it requires more study as the cities studied so far are not a representative sample. Moreover, several have studied the impact of national economic conditions on vote choice, but we lack the knowledge of how short-term fluctuations in local economic conditions might mediate the vote share of city council incumbents. These topics are the main focus of this paper as I seek to answer the following questions: Does incumbent status give a city council candidate a boost in vote share? Does this boost lessen when the incumbent's term is associated with economic floundering? Is the incumbent rewarded with higher vote share when the city experiences economic growth, or do voters use the current economic conditions to inform their vote? Using a dataset of eight large cities, I find that city council incumbents enjoy a significant electoral advantage. However, my findings for economic voting are mixed. They suggest that, though voters do not look to changing conditions to inform their, they may use current economic conditions when evaluating incumbents.