

WHAT DETERMINES VOTE SHARE  
IN CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS?  
THE INCUMBENT ADVANTAGE  
AND ECONOMIC VOTING

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

WHAT DETERMINES VOTE SHARE IN CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS?

THE INCUMBENT ADVANTAGE AND ECONOMIC VOTING

presented by Dana Angello,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

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.

## 1. Introduction

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 (Trounstine 2011; Krebs 1998), 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 (Kramer 1971; Fiorina 1981; Erikson 1989; Atkeson and Partin 1995; Svoboda 1995; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001), 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?

An intuitive and appropriate starting point for studying local elections is to apply theories developed at the national and state levels to elections local level. While local politics is different from other levels of government for several reasons, including smaller jurisdictions and nonpartisan contests in most places, city council members still exhibit behaviors of reelection-seeking politicians in that they engage in casework (Welch and Bledsoe 1988; Clingermayer and Feiock 1993; Svara 1999), and they better represent their electoral coalitions rather than the city as a whole (Trounstine 2008). Incumbents are 39 percentage points more likely to run for another term (Trounstine 2011, 265), and little over 80 percent either run for reelection or seek a higher office (Prewitt 1970, 176). Additionally, since the beginning of the 1980s, city councils

have been used as spring boards for ambitious politicians (Ehrenhalt 1992, 29; Moncrief , Squire, and Jewell 2001, 36). These studies suggest that the behavior and goals of incumbent local legislators do mirror those of a state or national politician as they seek to advance their political careers. In this way, the application of theories developed at the national and state level to the local legislatures is certainly appropriate and important to building a foundation of understanding city council elections.

Studies of cities are not only perfect for political scientists as they provide significant variation on variables of interest among cities, but the variables that impact vote share are enmeshed with governing behavior as elected officials' behavior is guided by their desire to be reelected (Mayhew 1975). This is especially important at the local level as they make up most of the governments in the country and have jurisdiction over the issues that most directly affect citizens. Some scholars have found that elected officials are responsive to their constituents in each level of government (Tiebout 1956; Arceneaux 2005; Berry and Howell 2007; Palus 2010) while others doubt that local governments are responsive (Gerber and Hopkins 2009). Moreover, at the local level turnout is usually low, and usually includes business interests and those of higher status, prompting reelection-seeking legislators to better represent these groups (Trounstine 2006, 2008). Clearly, more research should be conducted to fully understand voting behavior and what influences a candidate's electoral success.

In this paper I seek to add to the literature by examining the variables that impact candidate success and how voters evaluate their local candidates. I use a dataset of eight cities and sixteen city council elections from 1993 to 2007 to see whether council elections are subject to an incumbency advantage and whether that advantage is then mediated by short-term economic fluctuations. To estimate vote share of candidates in each election, I run cross-



sectional time series fixed effects models. First, though, I will review the federal and state level literature of incumbent advantage as well as retrospective economic voting. I will use the past literature of all levels of government to build my theory of the incumbent advantage and of economic voting in city council elections. Finally, I will explain my models and use them to test the theories.

## **2. Literature Review**

*What do we know about local legislative elections?* Much of the focus at the local level is on the lower voter participation rates and its effects. Just as at the state and national level, the participation rate across class and race are uneven, but even more so at the local level (Alford and Lee 1968). Indeed, scholars have found that cities with nonpartisan elections tend to be less responsive to minority and working class issues, perhaps a response to uneven voter turnout across racial and ethnic groups (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001; Hajnal and Trounstone 2005), suggesting that their focus on the engaged citizens creates bias. After all, nonpartisan elections attract more professionals, business executives, and managers to city councils (Rogers and Arman 1971; Cassel 1985), and business groups dominate the interest group arena (Fleischmann and Stein 1998; Krebs 2005). These groups set the agenda, mostly related to business-friendly policies, and minimizing the issues related to minority groups.

Interest groups are very active in local politics. In the absence of partisan politics, interest groups can provide candidate slates (Freeman 1958; Williams and Adrian 1959; Banfield and Wilson 1963, 132; Davidson and Fraga 1988; Trounstone 2006). This practice exacerbates the bias already present in local government participation by increasing the prospects for choosing business-friendly candidates. These groups are able to give professionals a helping hand in elections as they make up most of the contributions to council election campaigns (Krebs

2005). Corporations also strategically contribute to candidates based on committee placement and seniority (Krebs 2005). This may indicate that, at the very least, corporations perceive they influence council members at the committee level, particularly those with the most power.

When it comes to determinates of vote share at the local level, most attention has been paid to mayoral elections. Various scholars have found that the level of traffic congestion and adequate response to disaster contribute to the reelection chances of a local executive (Arceneaux 2005; Arceneaux and Stein 2006). Researchers have also emphasized the importance of race and ethnicity in local nonpartisan elections. Not only does this reduce informational costs in the absence of partisanship, but it also naturally flows from the nature of political issues of the allocation of scarce resources—i.e. road maintenance, crime deterrence (Kaufmann 2004).

The electoral system has an impact on the election of minorities and women. For instance, black males are more likely to be elected in district elections if the candidate is in the district's racial majority (Krebs 1998; Trounstine 2008). Black females enjoy no such advantage, but white females benefit from at-large elections and larger legislatures, and not surprisingly, are elected most often in western states (Trounstine 2008; Alozie and Manganaro 1993).

*Incumbent Advantage.* While literature focusing on the federal and state levels of government is replete with evidence on the advantage of incumbents (Ferejohn 1977; Fiorina 1977; Giles and Pritchard 1985; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Squire 1989, 1992; Abramowitz 1991; King and Gelman 1991; Cox and Morgenstern 1993; Adams and Squire 1997; Jacobson 2001; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2004), the local government literature on the

subject is less plentiful. Some scholars have shown an incumbent advantage in city council elections. Krebs (1999), for example, found that incumbency status increased the vote share of candidates in Chicago aldermanic elections. Additionally, Trounstein (2011) also provides evidence of an incumbent advantage in San Antonio, Austin, San Jose, and Dallas, using a regression discontinuity design, which removes endogeneity from the model. Ehrenhalt (1991) discusses an incumbent advantage in *The United States of Ambition*, but he draws conclusions from interviews with local politicians rather than a generalizable statistical analysis. These pieces are valuable additions to the literature, but given the limited samples of cities, the incumbent advantage at the local level requires more examination before we can generalize.

Several variables explain the phenomenon none of which alone would make a difference in electoral outcomes, but they collectively create an advantage for incumbent candidates. If legislators have a knack for campaigning—writing thank you notes and providing constituency services to likely voters—while legislating, their chances for reelection increase exponentially (Ehrenhalt 1992, 206). This phenomenon is magnified in full-time councils where legislators do not have to split time between their careers and council work, thereby allowing them to allocate more time to give special attention to constituents (Ehrenhalt 1992, 14). Also, just as the federal literature states (e.g. Cain , Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987), incumbents are able to gain the “personal vote” by providing constituency services, beneficial policies, and special projects for his or her district (Welch and Bledsoe 1988; Svara 1999; Serra and Cover 1992). Furthermore, the ability of councilors in council-manager governments to appoint a city manager gives them an indirect way to influence the bureaucracy so as to potentially benefit their constituents.

Moreover, councilors can hold town hall meetings to connect with their constituents. Not only does this create a positive image of promoting democracy, but incumbents can also hear

form those who participate the most in local politics (i.e. those most likely to vote), so they may implement policies or provide selective benefits tailored to the likely voters (Adams 2004). This direct communication with their constituents also gives incumbents the opportunity to tout their record of providing benefits to the district and to establish name recognition and their qualifications for office. This is especially important if some scholars are correct in arguing that the extent to which legislators frame an issue and send out credit-claiming messages is more important than the number of benefits provided (Hetherington 1996; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Lenz 2012; Grimmer, Messing, and Westwood 2012).

Unfortunately, the local government literature does not include research on other communication resources and staff capacity. Depending the extent of these resources, councilors may be able to establish their legitimacy via newsletters and other mail sent to constituents, as is the case for members of Congress (Abramowitz 1991; Bond , Covington, and Fleisher 1985; Jacobson 1992; Squire 1989; Fenno 1978; Canes-Wrone , Brady, and Cogan 2002).

Nevertheless, some argue that experience in city councils does not provide a high return. Because of the close proximity, smaller bureaucracy, and smaller councils, responding to constituents' needs may not require as much expertise as at the national state level (Trounstine 2011). As Prewitt's (1970) survey of council members suggests, many were already knowledgeable about the political process at the local level. Councilors also reported that they did not learn much new information during their term, exhibiting evidence that the learning curve in city councils is not so steep that experience is a highly valued characteristic. Of course, what matters in regard to the incumbent advantage is not necessarily the actual knowledge needed to be an effective local legislator, but how voters perceive the importance of experience to effective representation.

The federal and state literatures suggest that incumbents enjoy an advantage partially because the presence of an incumbent will deter higher-quality candidates from running because they tend to be more strategic than those of lesser quality. Consequently, incumbents are usually challenged by low-quality candidates who have limited political experience, little name recognition, and a small political social network; that is, all the characteristics that decrease the chances of raising sufficient funds and gathering enough volunteers to develop a campaign to adequately challenge an incumbent. (Carson , Engstrom, and Roberts 2007; Cox and Katz 1996, 2002; Gordon , Huber, and Landa 2007; Stone, Maisel, and Maestas 2004; Levitt and Wolfram 1997).

The literature is about challenger quality in city council elections is rather incomplete. Even though they may not have experience in council, challengers may appear qualified if their resumes include community involvement, prestigious careers, or other governmental positions (Bullock and Heys 1972; Dubeck 1976; Merritt 1977). Still, Krebs (1999) found that challengers are less likely to run when an invulnerable Chicago aldermanic incumbent is running for reelection. Quality challengers may wait to run in an open seat or they may gain enough name recognition and experience from other activities, giving them the confidence to run against an incumbent. Regardless of the challenger quality, local incumbents still have opportunities that create an advantage for them such as name recognition, experience in the legislature, and established voter and fundraising support.

Of course, the quality of the challenger can also be affected by the size of the pool of potential candidates (Adams and Squire 1989). The fact that an incumbent won the election in the first place indicates that he or she has qualities or affiliations conducive to electoral success. In particular, an incumbent usually wins when the party with which they identify is the majority

party in the district. This would then disadvantage the opposing party in that their choice of candidates would be more restricted than that of the majority party simply because they have a smaller sample from which to choose. Such evidence is especially relevant to the argument that incumbents have become increasingly advantaged over time due to the highly politicized process of redistricting (Cox and Katz 1996). State legislators—commissions, in some states—are able to draw district lines to advantage a party of their choosing, usually the party of the incumbent, thereby bolstering an incumbent's advantage.

Without city council candidates' partisan identification, non-partisan cues become more important to vote choice. For instance, voters use candidates' descriptive qualities such as gender, race, and ethnicity—and even the ethnicity of candidates' names—as indicators of similar interests (Karnig and Welsh 1979; McDermott 1997; Kaufmann 2004). Most relevant to the focus of this study, Schaffner, Streb, and Wright (2001) found in nonpartisan congressional and mayoral elections, incumbency becomes a more salient cue informing voters about the candidates.

*Retrospective Voting.* While incumbents may enjoy an advantage, they can also be vulnerable as voters evaluate policy outputs and outcomes; that is, if they engage in retrospective voting. In the national and state literature, evidence shows that voters do indeed engage in retrospective voting in that they evaluate candidates for both legislative and executive offices on their policy record and economic conditions (Key 1961, 1966; Downs 1957; Atkeson and Partin 1995; Johannes and McAdams 1981; Schmidt, Kenny, and Morton 1996; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Vote choice is partially influenced by idiosyncratic traits of the candidates (DeHoog, Lowery and Lyons 1990), but voters also evaluate candidates using the mindset of a rational actor in that voters want to elect someone who will provide benefits to them and their district

(Downs 1957; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Fiorina 1977; Svava 1999; McAdams and Johannes 1988). Though some doubt whether constituents are informed enough to evaluate incumbents' overall performance (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck 2008), for the most part, scholars agree that voters at least rely on candidates' recent performance to inform their votes (Fair 1978; Kramer 1971; Huber, Hill, Lenz 2012).

The voters' "what-have-you-done-for-me-lately" attitude is what incentivizes legislators to provide selective benefits to their constituents in an effort to win reelection (Mayhew 1995). In this way, incumbents have the advantage of gaining the "personal vote" (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987). Since city council members are interested in reelection they seek to provide benefits to their constituents (Welch and Bledsoe 1988; Svava 1999; Serra and Cover 1992). Serra and Cover (1992) found that incumbents' casework positively affected voters' perceptions of the incumbent. Such activities not only serve as a way to mobilize voters but also can be used as a persuasion technique (Serra and Cover 1992).

Incumbents especially focus on pleasing their constituents in regards to zoning and attracting new business. For instance, voters have a "not-in-my-backyard" (NIMBY) attitude; that is, they tend to prefer certain businesses (e.g. manufacturing plants) or loud highways stay out of their neighborhoods in an effort to protect the value of their homes (Fischel 2001). Furthermore, council members can also lobby for development policies that benefit their constituents (Clingermayer and Feiock 2001). After all, voters tend to enjoy amenities such as restaurants and shops near their homes. Not only is it convenient, but it increases the value of their homes (Fischel 2001). As voters are preoccupied with protecting their greatest asset, they also have an incentive to ensure their elected officials are handling the economy well.

*Economic Voting.* Generally speaking, the cost of voting for the average voter can be high because most are not informed of the intricacies of the political and governing processes. So, voters look for short-cuts that help inform their vote at a low cost. When it comes to voting based on policy outcomes—i.e. the health of the economy—both Key (1961; 1966) and Downs (1957) offer different theories of why voters evaluate candidates in this way. Key argues that retrospective voting is a reward-punishment system, offering a way for citizens to hold elected officials accountable for their past behavior. Essentially, citizens can either accept or reject the status quo.

Downs, though, argues that the motivation behind retrospective voting is the lower cost of forming expectations for a candidate's. The information of the incumbent's past behavior is a low-cost way of allowing voters to predict a candidate's actions during her potential upcoming term. A citizen's vote, then, becomes prospective in the sense that they evaluate incumbents on the expected policy outcomes if she were to serve another term. The cost of information decreases even more by the relative stability of party issue positions, and therefore, the ability of voters to align with one party that shares similar values and policy positions (Downs 1957).

A pure Downsian (1957) perspective would assume that voters use their own personal finances—"pocketbook voting"—to inform their vote, but literature on federal elections suggests the contrary. Instead, vote choice is linked to the national economic conditions; that is, they engage in "sociotropic" voting in state and national elections (Meehl 1977; Kinder and Kiewiet 1979, 1981; Kramer 1983; Kiewiet 1983). There are two explanations for lack evidence for pocketbook voting. First, as a prerequisite for self-interested voting, voters must feel as though the government is responsible for their economic status, but this logic has not been found in the



minds of voters. Instead, voters take an individualistic perspective in that they are responsible for their own economic success or failure (Hibbing and Alford 1981; Feldman 1982).

Second, according to Meehl (1977), they vote sociotropically to increase the probability of affecting electoral outcomes. If voters were to choose a candidate based on their own situation the probability of affecting the electoral success of a candidate would be negligible. However, looking to national economic indicators to standardize voter information is more rational in that it creates a collective action. Consequently, the probability of affecting electoral outcomes is greater. No doubt, the theory assumes a large amount of voter knowledge and their willingness to vote strategically. This contradicts much of the literature finding that voters are not very knowledgeable (Lewis-Beck, et al. 2008). A more simple explanation is that sociotropic voting occurs due to the salience of economic conditions during elections and consistent rhetoric regarding the unemployment rate and job creation statistics.

Regardless, the literature is clear that fluctuations in the economy are important to incumbents' electoral success. Gross national product, employment, and inflation rates are consistently used to estimate reelection prospects for both legislators and the executive at both the federal and state level (Kramer 1971; Fiorina 1981; Erikson 1989; Atkeson and Partin 1995; Svoboda 1995; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001). Most scholars view the health of the economy as a valence issue rather than a partisan one (Stokes 1963), but Wright (2012) suggests that high unemployment benefits Democrats in gubernatorial and presidential elections, regardless of the incumbent party. Similarly, Kiewiet (1981, 1983) has found that voters who have been negatively affected by economic conditions, report voting Democratic at higher rates. So, voters' evaluations may be partisan-based instead of candidate-centered. An alternative explanation for the connection between party and economic voting, though, is that those most

affected by bad economic conditions are those of lower socio-economic status who tend to identify themselves as Democrats. Such voters may be mobilized by economic hardship, creating a Democratic bias in the turnout rate.

Absent strong partisan participation in Los Angeles and New York City elections, Kaufmann (2004) argues, voting behavior is more in line with group interest theory in that citizens will vote for co-ethnics since race and ethnicity provide a cue of matching interests. After all, cities are generally segregated, much of the time resulting in different outcomes to the same policies. In mayoral election exit polls, Kaufmann found that those who did not share the same race with the incumbent rated less favorably the health of the economy, quality of life, safety, and the status of public schools. Her data suggests that not only do differences in retrospective voting exist between whites and minorities, but also across different minority groups (i.e. Blacks and Hispanics). Though her study is certainly valuable, it lacks generalizability since both New York and Los Angeles are exceptional cities given that they are classified as of the two largest cities, and they have full-time city councils. Moreover, city council elections encompass a higher percentage of local elections than do mayoral elections, allowing us to get more bang for our buck in one study.

Some doubt sociotropic voting occurs at the lowest level of government (Oliver and Ha 2007), but certain characteristics of local government suggest that the phenomenon would occur. For instance, as discussed in the previous section, those most likely to vote—home owners—are incentivized to remain knowledgeable about and ensure a healthy economy (Fischel 2001). Furthermore, voters look to the local government to improve economic conditions since the policies of local government are largely focused on economic development (Ostrom, Tiebout,

and Warren 1961; Banfield and Wilson 1963; Judd 1979; Peterson 1981; White 2006; Kaufmann 2004).

### **3. Theory**

The literature from state and federal elections provides a foundation for explaining the variables that influence vote share in city council elections. In particular, in this section, I provide a theoretical basis for the argument that city council incumbents enjoy an advantage and that this advantage is mediated by economic fluctuations.

*Incumbent advantage.* The limited role of political parties in local elections leaves the voter without the informational short-cut party identification provides. Party labels are important in informing the vote, allowing otherwise ignorant voters to vote rationally and remain responsive to government (Aldrich 1995). Indeed, party cues exist in nonpartisan elections (Squire and Smith 1988). The presence of machine politics in some cities such as Chicago, the political endorsements that cue a candidate's partisan leanings (Merritt 1977; Lieske 1989), or a candidate's past experience working in party organizations all provide profound information about partisanship.

Nevertheless, to recognize such partisan cues voters must be sufficiently informed about the candidate's campaign, but in local politics, the extent to which voters are informed about the candidates is minimal. To use Downs' (1957) model of the rational voter, the higher the cost of gaining information on the candidates, the lower the probability of voting. The cost of paying enough attention to a campaign so as to decipher the partisan cues and recognize what they are is fairly high, and, therefore, will most likely not be relevant to vote choice. Indeed, even if voters were to pay attention to issues, local elections usually deal with issues that are non-ideological,

“there being no Republican way to pave a street and no Democratic way to lay a sewer” (Adrian, 1952, 766), leaving them without the short-cut of party to help them evaluate a candidate.

As Lupia (1994) found, voters use more obvious—and cost-effective—cues to inform their vote, including race (Kaufman 2004), gender (McDermott 1997), and even the ethnicity of names on the ballot (Karnig and Welsh 1979). A candidate’s incumbent status also provides such a cue (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). Trounstine (2010), for instance, found evidence that in low-information elections, incumbents have more of an advantage. Both Cover (1977) and Ferejohn (1977) admit that waning party identification contributes to the increasing trend in the incumbent advantage, providing evidence that where party identification is weak, incumbent status plays more of a role in vote choice.

Not only does nonpartisanship increase the importance of incumbency, but the pool of likely voters is biased toward those who are likely to positively evaluate incumbents. Vote choice is partially based on the quality of basic services—trash pick-up, water, electricity, road maintenance—that directly and regularly affect citizens (James and John 2007; Boyne et al. 2009; Oliver and Ha 2007). The lens through which voters evaluate candidates in regards to these services is altered by several variables including their sense of connection to the community (DeHoog, Lowery, and Lyons 1990); race (Kaufmann 2004); and partisan cues (James 2011). Moreover, those with strong community attachment tend to give positive service evaluations, are educated, and are inclined to engage in retrospective voting (Stipak 1977, 1979; Dehoog, Lowery, and Lyons 1990; McDermott and Jones 2003). Because both community attachment and education are positively correlated with the likelihood of voting, the electorate will be bias in favor of the incumbent.

In essence, incumbency is not only a highly important information cue in city council elections, but those most likely to vote are predisposed to perceive a positive experience with government services. These factors that influence individual voting behavior should be apparent on a macro-level; that is, in the candidates' vote share. Therefore, I hypothesize that *incumbents will receive a higher vote share than challengers (hypothesis one)*.

*Retrospective Economic Voting.* The incumbent vote share, though, may very well be affected by short-term factors such as economic fluctuations, which would mediate the incumbent advantage. That is, voters evaluate the incumbent, at least partially, by the change in the economy throughout the incumbent's term. We see such economic voting at the federal and state level, but local government scholars have yet to examine whether these short-term factors influence electoral success.

Voters are likely to see the effects of changing economic conditions in their every-day life. For instance, an unemployed status of the voter or her loved ones, seeing closed businesses as one drives down the street, or observing an increased number of homeless men and women can provide cues of worsening economic conditions. Conversely, if the economy blossoms, voters would exhibit more businesses opening, more development, and more employment among loved one. In essence, while city voters may not be aware of official economic indicators such as the local unemployment rate, they can see its affects in their surroundings.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Important to note is that I make no argument for either pocketbook or sociotropic voting. I use the local unemployment rate as a measure of economic conditions, which in a state or federal contests would be a way to measure sociotropic voting. However, the local unemployment rate is more likely to co-vary with voters' personal financial situations than the national unemployment rate simply due to the latter's measure of a smaller area. Consequently, my theory is simply an argument that economic voting exists in city council election rather than an explanation of the impetus behind it.

Furthermore, the local economic conditions are important to likely voters. As Fischel (2001) argues, local politics is driven by “real-estate economics.” Homeowners—also known as “homevoters”—have a huge stake in the city’s economy because it affects the worth of their biggest asset, their home. With this incentive to pay attention to local economic conditions and local politics, “homevoters” will be likely to engage in economic voting, bringing in new leadership when the economy is in bad shape. The unemployment rate, because it can be felt through friends and family without jobs, is a low-cost way to judge the economic conditions, thereby creating an indirect relationship between the unemployment rate and the vote share for incumbents.

While the actions of city council members, both individually and collectively, do not necessarily influence the health of the local economy, voters are in the habit of evaluating incumbents’ based on events out of the candidates’ control (Cole, Healy, and Werker 2001; Healy, Malhortra, and Mo 2010). They use economic cues during an incumbent’s term to develop expectations if the incumbent were to win reelection (Downs 1957; Key 1961, 1966; Fiorina 1981). Furthermore, the focus of local policies that affect business also encourages citizens to turn to their politicians when they are seeking to blame someone for the state of the economy. Cities engage in some social policy, but they mostly create policy related to economic development and the allocation of scarce resources (Banfield and Wilson 1963; Judd 1979; Kaufmann 2004). City officials have an incentive to focus on economic development and basic services in an attempt to minimize conflict in highly diverse cities (Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren 1961; Peterson 1981; White 2006). This is evident by the policies that provide tax incentives for businesses to move to their city, planning and zoning strategies to maximize the value of homes and businesses, and setting property tax and sales tax rates (England 2012). The high

involvement of business interest groups is further evidence of the importance of city politics in the local economy (Fleishmann and Stein 1998; Krebs 2005).

Considering the relative saliency of development policies and the close-to-home nature of the unemployment rate in local elections, local voters are more likely to view local government as the responsible party in local economic downturns, which in turn makes voters more likely to evaluate incumbents based on economic fluctuations (Feldman 1982). Indeed, since voters can more easily “vote with their feet” by moving to other cities than to other states, local officials have an even greater incentive to ensure a healthy economy so as not to lose their much-needed tax base (Tiebout 1956; Fischel 2001).

Not only do I want to show that economic conditions affect incumbents’ vote share, I examine whether voters look to the changes in economic conditions during an incumbent’s term or whether the current economic state informs the vote. Consequently, I test two hypotheses. First, I hypothesize that *the more the unemployment rate decreases during an incumbent’s term, the more the incumbent’s vote share will increase (hypothesis 2)*. I expect null findings with this hypothesis for the simple reason that keeping track of the economic conditions across years is costly and requires a long-term memory. The federal literature backs this claim as scholars have found that voters look to recent economic conditions when evaluating candidates rather than looking at long-term trends (Stigler 1973; Fair 1978). Therefore, I also hypothesize, and expect to find support for *hypothesis 3—the higher the city’s average unemployment rate during election year, the lower the incumbent’s vote share will be*.

#### 4. Data and Methods

For each model, my unit of analysis is each candidate in 16 elections during the years 1993 to 2007 across a sample of eight large cities: Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Long Beach, Sacramento, Lexington, KY, Seattle, and Hillsborough County/Tamp, FL. While this study is not done at the individual level, if widespread patterns of economic voting exist in city council elections, the aggregate models should reflect this behavior.

I obtained most of the variables from Brian Adams' dataset entitled "Campaign Finance in Local Elections: an Eleven City Study" (ICPSR ID 25801). I also collected several variables for which I indicate the sources below. Because of data collection restrictions—campaign expenditures, candidate race, and district racial demographics more so than others—the scope of my dataset is more limited than Adams' original dataset, which spanned 11 cities and 18 years. This eight-city study is hardly a random sample as it is too small to encompass a representation of the cities in the United States; moreover, it includes 3 cities in California and 2 in Florida, leaving out most of Midwest beyond Chicago.

Different cities include different election years. For instance, Long Beach, California election years 2004 and 2006 are in the sample while election years 2001, 2003, and 2005 are included for New York City. The sample size within each city varies: Chicago has a sample size of 137 while Sacramento has a sample size of 21. (See Appendix 1 for election years and sample sizes for each city.) While generalizing from a sample this small may prove difficult, it is a good jumping off point until more campaign finance and district-level demographic data are available.



To test these hypotheses, I use a time series fixed effects models. Scholars have used this method when studying the incumbent advantage with district- and county-level data (Ansolabehere, Snyder, Stewart 2000; Desposato and Petrocik 2003) as well as studies of municipalities in the comparative politics literature (Jones 1998; Olle 2003; Sakurai and Menezes-Filho 2011). Fixed effects is the equivalent of adding to a regression model a dummy variable for each city in the sample. In essence, it captures the idiosyncratic traits of each city such as partisan elections in New York City and the history of political machines in Chicago and New York that, no doubt, still influence the outcome of elections (Wooldridge 2009, 493). Moreover, the demographic characteristics in each city vary. The mean district population in Los Angeles is over 200,000 while the districts in Long Beach and Sacramento are, on average, only 50,000 people strong. New York and Chicago have larger black populations than Los Angeles and Miami, but the latter two have larger Hispanic populations. Lastly, the sample includes institutional variation in terms of whether it has a strong or weak mayor, term limits, term length, and ward-based or at-large elections. (See Appendix 2 for a table of institutional characteristics.)

My dependent variable is the vote share of each candidate in the sample. I chose to use vote share as a measure because rarely do we get a chance to see what determines vote share in local elections. While some would choose to use the difference between the winning candidate's and the losing candidate's vote share, the fact that many of the races have more than two candidates complicates the matter. Moreover, calculating the sophomore surge—the difference between the vote share for the first time a candidate was elected and the second time—is not feasible due to data limitations on the candidates who ran for the first time many years ago (e.g. Ansolabehere et al. 2007). While I would be able to find the vote share for past elections, the

independent variables such as candidate expenditures, price indexes, and district racial demographics would not be available. Without these, I could not run an accurate estimation of vote share. Therefore, the most feasible option for this study is to measure the dependent variable by each candidate's vote share.

To test the first hypothesis, which posits an incumbency advantage, I include all candidates from the dataset, and measure the main independent variable as a dummy of *incumbent*. If the candidate had previously won an election for the same position, then she was coded as a one. If the candidate had served in a different government position or had no experience as an elected official, she was coded as zero.

To test each hypotheses 2 and 3, I use two different main independent variables of yearly average unemployment rates which I obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics's website. This proxy is appropriate in this circumstance because the local unemployment rate is likely to co-vary with economic information cues—unemployment of loved ones, closed businesses, and increased homelessness. First, I use the *change in the yearly average unemployment rates*. I calculated the variable by subtracting the yearly average unemployment rate of the election year from the average unemployment rate when the incumbent began her last term. A negative value of the variable indicates that it has decreased since the incumbent last took office, and a positive value shows an increase in the unemployment rate during the candidate's previous term. As discussed in the previous section, I do not expect the results to be statistically significant as voters will most likely take the less costly route and use current economic conditions to evaluate the incumbent candidate.

To test for hypothesis two, which reflects the more cost-effective way of informing one's vote, I regress vote share on the average unemployment rate of the election year as an alternative way to test hypothesis two. Rather than measuring whether voters are aware of the change in economic conditions from the beginning of the incumbent's term to reelection, an indirect relationship between the election year's unemployment rate and vote share would indicate that voters evaluate candidates on the present economic conditions.

In my sample, I include three types of elections: primaries, general, and run-offs. For each hypothesis, I run three models to separate out each election type. For the former two, I include controls for the number of opponents as more opponents will most likely decrease a candidate's vote share. While Krebs (1999) used this variable as a measure for competitiveness, the difference it makes may actually only be a similar phenomenon of third parties "stealing" votes from the main candidates. Either way, it is a necessary control.

Also important is that money spent by each candidate has an impact on vote share (Jacobson 1980; Gile and Pritchard 1985; Green and Krasno 1988; Erikson and Palfrey 1998; Krebs 1998; Krebs and Pelissero 2001). I include in each model the opposition's expenditures and the candidate's expenditures. What is more, some literature indicates that candidate expenditures reach a point of diminishing returns (Lieske 1989; Gierzynski and Breaux 1993); therefore, I include in the model a quadratic of the candidate's expenditures. The availability of candidate expenditures is rather limited, so the expenditures in the dataset reflects the expenditure figures that were available, not necessarily all expenditures in the election. Nevertheless, the expectation is for the candidate's expenditures to bolster a candidate's vote share while oppositions' expenditures will reduce it. The square of candidate's expenditures will then demonstrate that the variable encounters the law of diminishing returns.

Highly important in local elections—particularly non-partisan elections—are the demographic characteristics of the candidate—race and gender (Pomper 1966; Arrington 1978; Krebs 1999; Kaufmann 2004). Female is simply a dummy variable coded 1 for female and 0 for male, but race is slightly more complicated. Scholars have shown that voters tend to support candidates of their own race (Lieske and Hillard 1984; Inglot and Pelissero 1993; Herring and Forbes 1994), so I include a variable indicating whether the candidate’s race matches that of the majority in the district. The variable is a dummy with a one indicating that the candidate *is not* in the racial majority and a zero indicating that the candidate is part of her district’s racial majority population. I found the racial demographics of each district by contacting various city offices—boards of election, planning departments, and city clerks. For at-large elections, I entered the city’s census data; for years 1995 to 2004 I used 2000 statistics, and for 2005 to 2007, I used the 2010 data. In each model, I expect to find an inverse relationship between the race and gender controls and vote share; a candidate who is in the minority or a female will suffer at the polls more than one who is part of the racial majority or male.

## **5. Results**

*Incumbent Advantage in Council Elections.* Table 1 shows the results of the fixed effects models testing my first hypothesis that incumbent status would increase a candidate’s vote share. Both the primary and general elections models explain a significant portion of the variance, 72 and 80 percent, respectively. The run-off model explains less—26 percent of the overall variance—but is still highly significant. In each type of election incumbents enjoy a higher vote share than their opponents. Most significantly, in general elections incumbents’ vote share is 64.7 percentage points higher than non-incumbents and 40.6 percentage points higher in primary elections.

We must be cautious about the generalizability of incumbent's high coefficient in general elections as the model only includes two cities—Long Beach and New York. The electoral advantage may be exaggerated by a history of machine politics in New York City. Nevertheless, such a high coefficient signifies that, holding all other variables equal, incumbents will win a majority of the votes in reelection. While this is not the case in primaries, the evidence indicates that incumbents receive a high percentage of votes. In run-off elections, even though the incumbent advantage is smaller, 13.3 percentage points is a significant boost in vote share.

The main independent variable in each model have remarkable t-statistics, indicating that incumbency affects vote share 25 standard deviations out from the mean in both primaries and general elections. Such a high t-statistic tends to raise concerns, so to make sure that it is correct, I ran OLS, controlling for each city. The results were the same as in the fixed effects model. For primaries, the only cities showing statistical significance were Los Angeles and Sacramento, with p-values less than .10 and positive coefficients. In the general elections OLS model, New York City was significant with a negative coefficient (See Appendix 3 for graphs of the effect of incumbent status on vote share once all other effects are stripped away.)

The control variables, for the most part, show the expected relationships. For each additional opponent, vote share decreases by 3.5 percentage points in primaries and 6.2 percentage points in general elections. This is most likely the result of more candidates splitting the vote. The number of opponents was not needed in the run-off model due to the nature of the contests.

Furthermore, race and gender impact vote share differently. As expected, if a candidate's race does not match that of the majority of the district, then vote share decreases by about 4.5 percentage points in primaries and general elections. Race is even more influential in run-off

elections in that candidates who do not share the same race as the majority of constituents lose 9.4 percentage points. This relationship is statistically significant and confirms much of the literature about the importance of race in local elections (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Kaufamann 2004; Trounstone 2008). Differently, gender is only significant in general elections as women seem to have a 10-point advantage over men. This is contrary to expectations and to the coefficient signs in primaries and run-offs. The positive sign in general elections model may signify idiosyncratic relationships in either New York or Long Beach.

The influence expenditures have on vote share is not so straightforward. The campaign finance variables were omitted due to collinearity in the general elections model. However, in the primary and run-off models, we can be 95 percent confident that spending in support of the candidate has a positive effect on vote share, but the effect is negligible; that is, it only increases vote share by .0007 percentage points. The existing campaign finance literature was also correct in that campaign expenditures have a non-linear relationship, although this is only the case in primaries. Again, the coefficient is very small, so the effect of expenditures, linear or not, is very small. Differently, opposition spending is not statistically significant in any type of election, though it does have the expected negative sign. Leaving out the control for opposition expenditures does not make much difference in the statistical significance or the magnitude of the other independent variables' coefficients; nevertheless, I did test for joint significance, which convinced me to leave opposition spending in the model.<sup>2</sup>

*The Effect of Changing Economic Conditions.* Table 2 shows the results of the models for hypothesis one—a decrease in the unemployment rate during an incumbent's term will cause an

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<sup>2</sup> Primaries: F-statistic-2.20 and p-value-0.09; Run-offs: F-statistic-3.07 and p-value-0.02 important to note is that the significance in the F-test could be driven by the highly significant influence candidate expenditures has on the dependent variable as opposed to both variables jointly affecting vote share.

increase in vote share. The primary and general election models, overall, are highly significant and explain 47 and 35 percent of the variation. Again, we should be careful when interpreting the general elections model because the only city in the sample is New York City. Moreover, the run-off model lacks any statistical significance overall. Moreover, the unemployment rate change not only is statistically significant, but the relationship is contrary to the theory of economic voting. The coefficients indicate that a one-point increase in the unemployment rate during the incumbent's term would result in about 1 percentage point increase in vote share for the incumbent, which does not make intuitive sense. Generally speaking, we would expect that as the economic conditions worsen, vote share for the incumbent would decrease.<sup>3</sup>

*The Effect of Current Economic Conditions.* Table 3 shows an estimation of the influence of the election year's average unemployment rate on vote share. The models are significant and explain between 22 and 61 percent of the variation. In line with the theory, each coefficient for the unemployment rate is negative, signifying that the higher the average unemployment for election year, the lower the incumbent's vote share will be. However, the independent variable only shows significance in the run-off model. In run-offs, current economic conditions have the largest impact as vote share decreases by 5.5 percentage points for each one-point increase in the unemployment rate.

Changing the main independent variable in the economic voting models did not significantly change the influence of the control variables. Still important in estimating vote share for incumbents are the controls for the number of opponents. For each additional

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<sup>3</sup> To ensure that voters do not look to the national unemployment rate instead of the local, I also ran a model replacing the local unemployment rate with national. This, however, resulted in the same relationship, which is not surprising because local and national unemployment rates are highly correlated (Pearson's R=.9611).

opponent, the incumbent's vote share decreases by 8 percentage points in both the primary and general elections models.

In the models estimating vote share with economic indicators, most of the control variables showing significance in the incumbent advantage model are no longer significant estimators of vote share during reelection. For instance, whether the incumbent's race matches that of the majority of their constituents is no longer significant at any confidence level. The variable has the expected negative coefficient in primary elections, but not in general elections, though this may be the result of the small sample of cities. Also, gender only shows significance in the general elections model, though the sign is different than expected. The coefficients show that females have about a 5-point advantage in general elections. Lastly, expenditures both for and opposing candidates are no longer significant, though the coefficients do still have the expected signs. Expenditures in support of the candidate have a positive effect on vote share, but are again mediated by diminishing returns. Lastly, opposition spending decreases vote share.

## **6. Discussion**

*Incumbency.* My first hypothesis that incumbents have an advantage when running for reelection is confirmed and in agreement with studies of the incumbent advantage in Chicago, a few Texas cities, and California cities (Krebs 1998; Trounstine 2011). Not only was incumbent status significant in each election type, but the extent of the impact was large. Most significant is that incumbents' vote share is 64.7 percentage points higher than that for non-incumbents. Moreover, their advantage is 40.6 percentage points higher when facing challenger(s) in a primary. While the incumbent advantage was less in run-off elections, a 13.3 percentage-point benefit can still potentially impact electoral outcomes. Essentially, based on the aggregate data,



voters rely on incumbency as an informational cue when party labels are absent in an election. Of course, this is not to say that no party cues exists, just that voters prefer to minimize the cost of voting by using incumbency as a cue.

Moreover, while this provides evidence that likely voters tend to evaluate incumbents in a positive light, the aggregate analysis does not confirm this explanation (James and John 2007; Boyne et al. 2009; Oliver and Ha 2007). Individual-level data would be the best way to determine such a relationship exists. Along with these city government-specific reasons for the incumbent advantage, the reasons for the advantage at the state and federal level also apply. City council incumbents have the benefits of name recognition, franking privileges, established support groups, and fundraising groups. While the incumbency advantage certainly seems like an obvious phenomenon, studying the dynamics of local elections are important, because the nature of city politics does not always mimic that of state and federal governments, though it does in this case.

*Retrospective Economic Voting.* The empirical analysis of economic voting provides mixed results. The information conveyed from the analysis of changing economic conditions is straightforward, but analyzing economic conditions during election year is not. First, as expected, voters do not use changing unemployment rates during the incumbent's term no matter the type of election—primary, general, or run-off. This not only makes logical sense in that keeping track of economic fluctuations is more costly than simply looking at the present conditions (Downs 1957), but the results are also consistent with federal literature that emphasizes the short memory of voters (Stigler 1973; Fair 1978).

The theory of economic voting centered on current economic conditions was not confirmed. The statistical analysis did not show significance in primary and general elections; however, in run-off elections, an increase in the unemployment rate resulted in decreased vote share for the incumbent, which does support my hypothesis. Regardless of the null findings in the former two models, economic voting in city council elections is still plausible. The results may be a Type II error, showing lack of significance due to a small sample size. Worth pursuing is an extension of the sample that would be more representative and more conducive to time series models. In all, though I find evidence of economic voting only in run-off elections, this study does not necessarily disprove the existence of economic voting in primary and general city council elections.

Lastly, there is no doubt that race and ethnicity play a large part in local politics, and even though the variable for race match was not significant, these findings do not necessarily contradict those of Kaufmann (2004) who found that vote choice is more influenced by group interests than by the evaluation of policy outcomes. Though the variable is not significant in the economic voting models, this may be a reflection of a larger bias among voters in city council elections than in mayoral elections. Kaufmann focused on mayoral elections, which are likely to be more salient than city council elections because executives tend to be more visible to the public. Therefore, those who vote for council, whether it be in a separate election or further down the ballot, may be a smaller, more biased group than those who vote in mayoral elections, changing the role race plays in their candidate evaluations.

Likely voters at the local level tend to be the most educated, own homes, and have professional careers, to a higher degree than participants in state and national government. If the voting pool in city council elections is indeed smaller than in mayoral elections, perhaps the

more educated voters, regardless of their race or ethnicity, are less likely to take race into account when evaluating a candidate. These are simply suppositions about local voters, which require substantiation by future research on roll-off in local elections and the behavior of likely voters.

## **7. Conclusion**

Lacking in the existing literature is an understanding of what influences the election of candidates to city council. This study seeks to fill that void, working toward grasping the differences and similarities between city elections and elections for higher offices. I tested two hypothesis of vote share for three types of elections—primaries, general elections, and run-offs. First, I found evidence that incumbents do indeed enjoy an advantage in that they receive significantly higher vote shares than challengers. In city council elections, according to the aggregate data, voters use incumbency as a cost-effective way to inform their vote, particularly because of the absence of official partisanship.

Second, as an extension of the federal and state literature, the vote share of incumbents is affected by economic conditions, measured by the local unemployment rate, in run-off elections. That is, rather than voters evaluating candidates on the change in the state of the economy during the incumbent's term, they use the current economic conditions to influence their vote choice. Though I do not find evidence of economic voting in primaries and general elections, further study may produce different results. Clearly, there are exceptions to any of the evidence of incumbent advantage and economic voting. Not everyone is going to use such cues to inform their vote, but the aggregate data suggests that this does happen on a large scale.

The focus of future studies of incumbency and economic voting should be on individual-level data. This would give us a deeper understanding of how voters choose between candidates. In interviews with voters, we could more accurately assess whether race and ethnicity play a role in retrospective voting and whether voters use national economic cues rather than local. We can also more accurately assess who exactly is voting and how much they pay attention to city policy outputs and outcomes. As was the goal, this study opens a window for more research on local elections for which the existing research is sparse.

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**Table 1: The Effect of Incumbency on Vote Share: Time-series Fixed-Effects**

	Primary Elections Coefficient (standard error)	General Elections Coefficient (standard error)	Run-off Elections Coefficient (standard error)
Incumbent	40.6 (1.60)***	64.7 (2.66)***	13.3 (3.02)***
Number of opponents	-3.48 (0.31)***	-6.17 (1.71)***	--
Race match	-4.45 (1.56)***	-4.58 (2.40)*	-9.39 (3.58)**
Candidate Expenditures	0.0007 (0.0003)**	--	0.0007 (0.0003)**
Candidate Expenditures- squared	$-7.37 \times 10^{-9}$ ( $5.85 \times 10^{-9}$ )*	--	$-7.06 \times 10^{-9}$ ( $2.78 \times 10^{-9}$ )
Opposition Expenditures	-0.0007 (0.0006)	--	-0.003 (0.002)
Female	-0.03 (1.34)	10.29 (2.68)***	-3.05 (2.87)
Constant	34.8 (1.76)***	30.22 (3.86)**	49.65 (2.51)***
N	509	192	85
Number of Groups	7	2	5
F-statistic	161.7***	2227.41***	5.47***
Overall R-squared	0.72	0.80	0.26
Within R-squared	0.70	0.83	0.31
Between R-squared	0.90	1.00	0.86

**Table 2: The Effect of Changing Economic Conditions on Vote Share: Times-Series Fixed-Effects**

	Primary Elections Coefficient (standard error)	General Elections Coefficient (standard error)	Run-off Elections Coefficient (standard error)
Unemployment rate Change	1.13 (1.48)	0.74 (0.80)	1.01 (1.65)
Number of opponents	-8.30 (0.99)***	-8.67 (1.44)***	--
Race match	-.46 (3.53)	1.72 (2.13)	--
Candidate Expenditures	0.002 (0.002)	--	0.0008 (0.004)
Candidate Expenditures-squared	-3.58x10 <sup>-8</sup> (3.17x10 <sup>-8</sup> )	--	--
Opposition Expenditures	-0.0006 (0.0007)	--	--
Female	-3.43 (2.95)	4.94 (2.27)**	5.12 (5.09)
Constant	86.1 (3.61)***	95.8 (2.10)***	67.7 (2.99)***
N	106	81	80
Number of Groups	7	1 (NYC)	6
F-statistic	11.69	10.09	0.45
Overall R-squared	0.47	0.35	0.0004
Within R-squared	0.47	0.35	0.02
Between R-squared	0.85		0.33

**Table 3: The Effect of Current Economic Conditions on Vote Share: Times-Series Fixed-Effects**

	Primary Elections Coefficient (standard error)	General Elections Coefficient (standard error)	Run-off Elections Coefficient (standard error)
Unemployment Rate	-2.22 (1.87)	-1.09 (1.18)	-5.45 (2.04)***
Number of opponents	-8.23 (0.93)***	-8.68 (1.44)***	--
Race match	-0.67 (3.34)	1.72 (2.13)	--
Candidate Expenditures	0.002 (0.002)	--	0.003 (0.009)
Candidate Expenditures-squared	-3.70x10-8 (3.01x10-8)	--	-4.61x10-7 (1.97x10-6)
Opposition Expenditures	-0.0006 (0.0007)	--	--
Female	-3.62 (2.83)	4.94 (2.27)**	4.70 (4.81)
Constant	91.81 (6.85)***	101.17 (7.05)***	90.76 (9.33)***
N	111	81	82
Number of Groups	7	1 (NYC)	6
F-statistic	14.74***	29.79***	2.04*
Overall R-squared	0.48	0.61	0.22
Within R-squared	0.52	0.57	0.10
Between R-squared	0.62	0.74	0.35



## Appendix 1: Sample Details

City	Years	Testing Hypothesis 1			Testing Hypotheses 2a			Testing Hypothesis 2b		
		Primary	General	Run-off	Primary	General	Run-off	Primary	General	Run-off
Chicago	2003	137	--	8	48	--	9	48	--	9
Hillsborough County/Tampa Bay, FL	2003; 2007	26	--	6	2	--	1	2	--	1
Lexington, KY	1998; 2000; 2002; 2004; 2006	--	--	--	--	--	50	--	--	50
Long Beach, CA	2004; 2006	25	8	6	7	--	2	7	--	2
Los Angeles	1993; 2001	87	--	19	2	--	1	7	--	3
New York City	2003; 2005	127	184	--	31	81	--	31	81	--
Sacramento, CA	2002; 2006	21	--	--	6	--	--	6	--	--
Seattle	1997; 1999; 2001; 2003; 2005	86	--	46	10	--	17	10	--	17

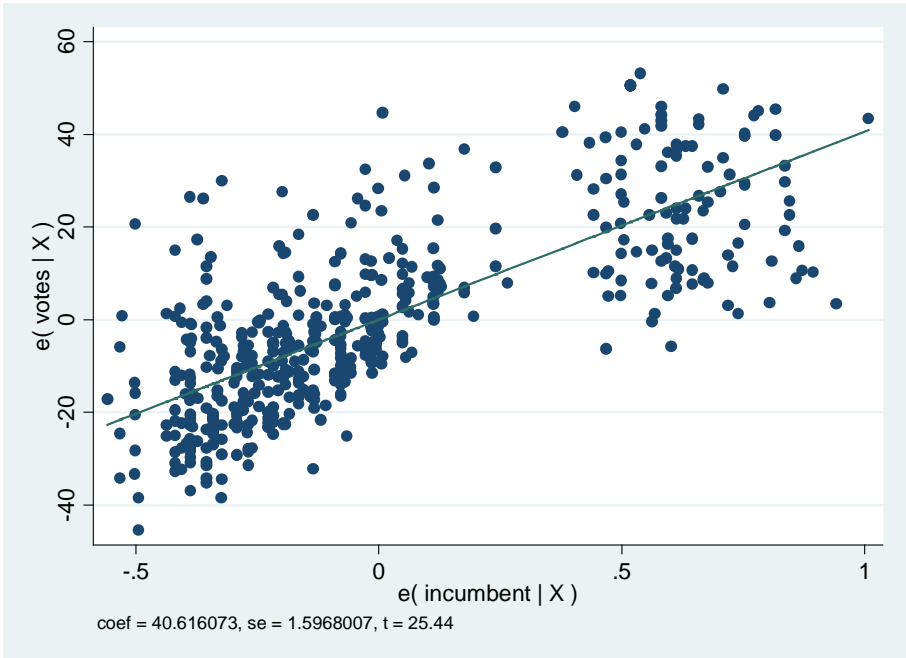
## Appendix 2: Institutional Characteristics by City

City	Council Members (not including mayor)	Form of Government	Ward or At-Large Elections	Partisan	Term Limits	Term Length (years)	Frequency of Full Council Meetings	On Ballot with Mayor	Time of Elections
Los Angeles	15	Strong mayor	Wards	No	3 terms lifetime limit	4	3 per week	Yes	June odd years
New York City	51	Strong mayor	Wards	Yes	8 consecutive years; 2 terms lifetime limit	4	2 per month	Yes	Nov. Odd years
Chicago	50	Strong mayor	Wards	No	None	4	1 per month	Yes	Feb. odd years
Lexington, KY	15	Mayor-Council	12 Wards; 3 At-large	No	6	Wards-2; At-large-4	2 per month	Yes	Nov even years
Long Beach	9	Council-manager	Wards	No	2 terms lifetime limit	4	1 per week	Yes	April even years
Sacramento	8	Council-manager	Wards	No	None	4	4 per month	Yes	Nov. even years
Hillsborough County/Tampa, FL	7	Strong mayor	4 Wards; 3 At-large	No	2 consecutive terms	4	1 per month	Yes	March odd years
Seattle	9	Strong mayor	At-large	No	None	4	1 per week	Yes	Nov. Odd years

Sources were city websites, see works cited

### Appendix 3: Incumbent Status' Effect on Vote Share

#### Primary Elections



#### General Elections

