

Joshua A. Tucker

Regional Economic Voting: Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic

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Abstract

This paper presents two models for predicting the effect of cross-regional variation of economic conditions on cross-regional variation in election results in post-communist countries. The Referendum Model predicts that Incumbent parties will perform better in areas of the country with better economic conditions, while the Transition Model predicts that New Regime parties will perform better in areas of the country where the economy is stronger and Old Regime parties will perform better where the economy is weaker. Using an original data set of regional level economic, demographic, and electoral variables, it is demonstrated that across 20 national presidential and parliamentary elections from Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, there is substantially stronger empirical support for the Transition Model. Moreover, the effect of the economy on Incumbent parties is largely conditional on their status as New Regime parties, Old Regime parties, or neither type of party. These findings should be of interest to students of elections and voting in post-communist countries, those concerned with economic voting more generally, and scholars interested in the methodological challenges of conducting comparative analysis. Moreover, they have interesting implications for current debates regarding the relationship between elections and representation.