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Economic Retrospective Voting in American National Elections: A Micro-Analysis

The article by Morris P. Fiorina tries to show that there is a relationship between economics and how people vote, that is when people are doing well they keep voting for the incumbents in office but when they are facing economic hardship they support the opposition. The article's main point is that the decline in the polls may not be because of a voters economic hardship and that very little support was found for the economic retrospective voting mode he concludes by stating that "for some types of election at some particular times". Morris P. Fiorina shows that there are many variables involved and therefore provides data to examine micro level basis in helping find a macro level relationship.

The research question is as follows: does a citizen's personal economic condition determines how they will vote, that is whether will they support or oppose the incumbents. The congressional vote is the dependent variable while economic indicators are the independent variables. The questions assume that people in power have control over the economy through legislation and policy implementation. This question tries to determine whether voters act the same for the presidential election or when voting for Congress.

One of the analysis was by Kramer whose independent variable was the Republican share of the congressional vote and independent variables were employment, per capita real income, per capita money income, consumer price index. He found that real income and inflation do have an impact on congressional voting. There is a debate on whether Kramers results are robust as they do not hold when the dependent variable changes. Because there are many variables when tested separately this leads to different conclusions such as the study conducted by Arcelus and Meltzer where they found that unemployment rates are irrelevant and that consumer price level does have significance. Lepper found that changes in price level and unemployment negatively affect incumbent congressmen, which contradicts others. It is noted that Lepper omitted real income There is a debate on what variables and type of analysis should be performed. Morris P. Fiorina rejects Stigler's claim that there is no link between an incumbents economic performance and voters support. Morris argues that because only a time series of the aggregate congressional vote data set has been examined this leads to confusion and the need for another data set to be examined.

Morris analysis is based on election survey data as opposed to a time series of the aggregate congressional vote. The theory is that survey data is not "amenable to fancy statistical manipulations", and that data is individual, not aggregate. It is assumed that citizens rely on the outcomes of policies and not the event that produces such outcomes. To establish the relationship between economic conditions and how an individual votes. It is noted that this survey relates to personal impact and how the person taking the survey feels.

The hypothesis is that adding an extra data set will establish that a person's personal economic conditions affect the presidential vote but not for congressional voting. The survey determines how a person feels about their economic conditions this, in turn, can be used to measure whether they support a certain incumbent president or the opposition. Morris provides a table that concludes that Eisenhower had solid support as opposed to Stevenson when the voter perceived their economic condition to be better. The opposition was supported when a person perceived their economic standing to be worst. There are more than one hypotheses, the first one is that those who perceive their situation to be constant or improved will support their party, the second hypotheses is that the incumbent party will be supported if the voter is doing better.

The research design is as follows where the model of analysis takes the independent variables to be party identification and economic situation. The dependent variable is a vote for republican or democrat. Survey data is used to determine whether respondents vote for the incumbent presidential party or the opposition. This survey data is used to either support or oppose the economic retrospective model. Using logit estimates for both presidential and congressional elections. The survey questions rely on how a person feels about their economic situation, however, this does not show how if a voter attributes his economic situation to the incumbent's administration. The analysis is designed to included extra questions that will help determine if a voter attributes economic success or failure to the current administration. There are extra questions in the 1962 and 1972 data set that deal with a voters perception economic conditions. In order to determine the relationship between economic conditions and voter turnout Morris used the vote, not vote as dependent variables.

Empirical analysis suggests that economic situation does not have an impact on a voters congressional vote. The logit Coefficients for 1962 and 1972 are mixed instead of being positive as expected, this shows that the perception of the state of the economy does not influence people's congressional vote. In 1972 the results support that the economy has an impact on the presidential election.

The main findings are that the analysis using logit estimates from using survey data do not support the retrospective model that elections outcomes are not based on how an incumbents administration handled the economy. There is evidence that presidential elections are influenced by economic conditions but not as much for congressional elections. It is concluded that there may be hidden factors, that is mediating variables. There are years that events such as recessions affected how a person felt about the economy, and it is also noted that the government to some extent has no control over the economy. People who are facing economic hardships are also less likely to vote and turnout may be low. In order to do analysis, Morris notes that we must take into account how economics affects voter turnout.

The contribution to the discipline is that voters behavior is determined by the type of election and times. Candidates and parties have a platform that influences the perception of the voter. It may be the case that when a party expects defeat they will not mobilize or be willing to invest in the election, in turn giving the opposition an advantage. It is concluded that the economy may influence congressional vote but it must be noted that there are many more variables that must be taken into consideration. It may be that social movements such as the anti-war movement, and Civil Rights may eclipse how a voter feels about their economic situation. Adding an extra data set of election surveys did not determine whether a voters financial situation influenced how they vote for presidential or congressional elections.

Fiorina, Morris P. "Economic Retrospective Voting in American National Elections: A Micro-Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1978, p. 426., doi:10.2307/2110623.