FR9.40.09 Urban Elections: Funding and Power

Who Funds Municipal Elections?

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Each election cycle, candidates for local elections collect millions of dollars to fund their campaigns. Despite the tremendous amount of money contributed to local political candidates, there has been little systematic investigation of the nature of this campaign finance system, including the composition of the funding coalitions assembled by candidates and the contribution patterns of individual donors. In this paper, we draw on administrative records of campaign contributions from the 2013 Seattle elections to answer three questions about the financing of municipal elections. First, we ask about the contribution patterns of individual donors in these campaigns. Next, we identify the influence of high-dollar donors in the funding coalitions assembled by candidates. Finally, we investigate the geographic concentration of donors within neighborhoods in Seattle. Building on previous studies, this research opens a new window into local campaign finance - an aspect of the political system that has been largely overlooked in research on campaigns and elections. Our findings reveal that a small number of high-dollar donors play an outsized role in financing municipal elections. Most donors give to a single candidate in the election, rather than contributing to multiple candidates. Candidates draw on a geographically concentrated network of local donors to fund their campaigns.

Campaign Donations & Electoral Outcomes: Examining the 2014 Municipal Elections in Metro Vancouver

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The tenets of urban regime and growth machine theories suppose that corporate elites have an outsized influence over the municipal decision-making process. Clarence Stone and Harvey Molotch state that relationships between the business community and policy makers exist to advance economic development, creating an informal arrangement that has a significant impact on the evolution of cities. However, neither Stone nor Molotch explain how the power and influence of the business elite is exercised on the ground. The research looks at the role campaign contributions play in electoral outcomes and examines the following question: what impact does money have on electoral success in municipal politics and who benefits from the current campaign finance paradigm? Using quantitative analysis of data culled from financial disclosure documents from the 2014 civic elections in Metro Vancouver, this thesis is able determine that campaign contributions and spending has a significant impact on electoral success. Funds have been categorized into donor groupings, making it possible to determine which types of contributors, be they individuals, labour groups, developers or corporate interests, have the best outcomes for the candidates they support. Key findings: Regression analysis shows that both campaign contributions and campaign spending has a significant impact on vote totals, particularly in the early stages. For example, the first $1,000 in spending or donations correlates with the highest increase in the number of ballots cast for a given candidate, while the impact money has on vote totals decreases as contributions and donations increase. The thesis also examines the role incumbency plays in electoral success and demonstrates how corporate regimes use their financial resources to influence policy makers and electoral outcomes.

The Instrumental Office: The Effect of Framing City Council as a Difference-Maker on a Individual's Interest in Running for an Open Seat

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Individuals concerned about their communities have several tactics, or acts of political participation, at their disposal to make a difference. These are familiar to those who study political participation. Individuals can vote for their preferred candidates, donate money to causes or candidates that address their concerns, organize other individuals concerned about the same things, etc. One tactic that is often excluded from this list of participatory acts, is running for office. There are many legitimate reasons why individuals avoid running for office, but having a seat on an elected body such as city council gives an individual the power to make a difference she would not have as a private citizen. In this study, I make use of a survey experiment on 590 adults in the United States to test whether framing city council as a way to make a difference in the community increases interest in running for an open seat on city council. Literature on this subject has emphasized the importance of ambition to interest in running for elected office. I find that when a seat on city council is framed as an instrument of an individual's ambition (via status and name-recognition) it has no effect on her interest in running for an open seat. Framing a seat on city council as a way to make a difference, though, significantly ($p<0.001$) increases an individual's interest in running for an open seat. The effect of this framing remains significant ($p<0.01$) when controlling for age, race, and gender, suggesting this framing has an effect that is applicable to many different groups of people. These results help to reframe our understanding of elected office, not as an instrument for ambition, but as an instrument for making a difference. They may also help to encourage more individuals to run, who have a desire to be active in their communities but are unsure of how to make the most impact.

Which Way is Up?--Political Ads and Political Reality in Local Places

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There is more money in U.S. politics than ever before. The 2016 campaign is estimated to cost $4.4 billion in political advertising with over 80 percent of that money going to local television stations (Pew Research Center, 2014). This influx of money into political campaigns is directly related to the Citizens United decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 2010. While much attention has been directed toward the Presidential races, the more significant effect of the decision is visible in Congressional election spending—from $2.5 billion in 2006 to $3.8 billion in 2014 (OpenSecrets.org, 2015). During the election cycle, citizens are inundated with political ads which often proclaim mutually exclusive visions of problems and solutions. The vast majority of these ads appear on local television newscasts and that has implications for the civic engagement of communities. What is the relationship between the political ads and the information that newscasts provide to audiences that is necessary for engagement in the public issues of the day? In this research we looked at political ads and local television newscasts in twelve markets in battleground states during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. What did citizens see?