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

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A number of recent studies examine the traditional hypothesis that the electoral fortunes of the incumbent president's party rise and fall in direct relation to fluctuations in the state of the national economy. Typically these studies employ a longitudinal design in which a party's aggregate congressional vote serves as the dependent variable, and various economic indicators serve as independent variables. On balance, the election returns appear to bear some relation to economic conditions, although various disagreements exist. Using data from the 1956 to 1974 SRC election studies this paper attempts to uncover an individual-level basis for the macro-relationship found by earlier studies. Specifically, do citizens vote for or against the incumbent president's party as a function of their personal economic condition? The survey data permit us to conclude that a citizen's personal economic condition affects his presidential vote. For congressional voting, however, the findings are positive until 1960 and negative thereafter. And contrary to some previous research, we find no systematic relationship between a citizen's personal economic condition and his decision to vote or abstain.

I. Introduction

Both officeholders and political observers believe that election returns vary systematically with the economic conditions which prevail in the period prior to elections. Evidence for this observation appears on the editorial pages of every major newspaper, not to mention in the memoirs of politicians (Nixon, 1962). Furthermore, there are definite indications that politicians act on such beliefs. Tufte (1978), for example, shows that during election years the American government engages in various economy-expanding activities, whereas such activities are muted or absent in nonelection years. Similarly, Wright (1974) presents evidence that New Deal spending and program decisions were "targeted" to have maximum

electoral impact, while Nordhaus (1975) points out the rough coincidence of the unemployment and electoral cycle.

Although the conventional wisdom links changing economic conditions to changing electoral fortunes, and although national politicians clearly subscribe to that wisdom, some skeptical social scientists have questioned whether the links really exist. Do the economic policies of the national government and the economic conditions they influence affect the voting decisions of the American citizenry? Or, as Key asks, does the politicians' dance take place before a blind audience? In recent years a number of studies have addressed these questions, but as yet they have not provided definitive answers. The purpose of this paper is to introduce some additional data into the discussion, in hopes of resolving some of the disputes which have arisen from earlier analyses of one particular kind of data. These new data enable us to examine the microlevel basis for the existence of macrolevel relationships between economic conditions and election returns. After briefly reviewing the existing state of knowledge, I will begin the analysis of these individual-level data.

II. The Literature: Do Economic Conditions Affect Congressional Election Results?

The first systematic analysis of this question is Gerald Kramer's (1971) effort to relate variations in the aggregate congressional vote to specific economic indicators. Kramer's dependent variable is the Republican share of the congressional vote between 1896 and 1964. Independent variables include employment, per capita real income, per capita money income, the consumer price index, and two political variables—incumbency and presidential coattails. Overall, Kramer is relatively successful in explaining variations in the vote. His specific findings are that unemployment appears to have little or no impact on the aggregate vote, but real income and inflation do.[1]

Kramer's careful analysis was attacked by economist George Stigler (1973) who showed that Kramer's results are sensitive to a change in the time period covered (1902–1970 vs. 1896–1964), to a shift from a one-year to two-year base in calculating fluctuations in economic conditions, and to a decision to include rather than drop 1912 and the war years of

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[1] In his original *Review* article, Kramer did not report that inflation influenced the vote. However, a later version of the paper which contains a corrected real income time series concludes that inflation is related to the vote. See Bobbs-Merrill Reprint PS-498.

1918, 1942, 1944. Additionally (and not surprisingly), changing the dependent variable from share of the vote to *changes* in the share of the vote seriously affects some results. But despite the instability of coefficients and "t" values in Stigler's many specifications, some of the (intercorrelated) economic variables, whether unemployment, real income, or price level, typically have a statistical impact on the congressional vote.

Nevertheless, adding insult to injury, Stigler dismisses the behavioral model underlying Kramer's analysis, a simple retrospective voting model which states that so long as economic conditions stay good, incumbents thrive, while they suffer when conditions turn bad. This hypothesis evokes Stigler's disdain. In the first place, he argues, the parties do not really differ on economic policy. Secondly, fluctuations in economic conditions may very well lie beyond the control of the government, or result from honest mistakes. Ergo, Stigler concludes, the retrospective voter is silly. A visceral reaction against the government might very well move him from frying pan to fire.

Succeeding studies divide similarly to Kramer-Stigler. Arcelus and Meltzer (1975) examine both turnout and the partisan division of the congressional vote between 1896 and 1970. They find unemployment rates to be irrelevant, but the consumer price level appears to have some impact. Interestingly, Arcelus and Meltzer claim that any effects of economic variables fall mainly on turnout: as conditions get better, turnout increases. The thrust of the Arcelus-Meltzer piece is primarily negative, however:

> There is very little evidence that an incumbent President can affect the composition of the Congress by measures that have short-term effects on unemployment or real income. (1975, p. 16)

On the other hand Lepper (1974) finds that changes in the price level (up or down) hurt incumbent congressmen, as do rises in unemployment. The latter finding seems to contradict those of Kramer, Stigler, and Arcelus and Meltzer, but Lepper omits real income from her analysis, thus allowing unemployment to pick up the effect attributed to real income by other researchers. Attempts to refine her analysis by considering some metropolitan areas and whole county congressional districts produce inconclusive results.

Tufte (1975) combines aggregate survey data (presidential performance) and aggregate economic data (real income) in an analysis of the presidential party's vote loss in post-New Deal midterm elections. Contrary to Stigler, Tufte finds a clear impact of economic conditions on congressional voting. Based on his analysis he observes that:

> A change of $100 in real disposable personal income per capita is associated with a national change of 3.5 percentage points in the mid-term vote for congressional candidates of the president's party. (1975, p. 817)

Finally, Bloom and Price (1975) add a new twist to the econometric studies by incorporating the traditional negative voting hypothesis: the evil that incumbents do lives on, while the good is oft forgotten.[2] Sure enough, the aggregate data appear to show that congressional candidates of the incumbent presidential party suffer during bad times, but do not necessarily prosper during good times. In treating upward and downward fluctuations in economic indicators symmetrically, earlier econometric models may have been misspecified.

On the whole the evidence appears to indicate that economic conditions have an impact on the outcomes of congressional elections, although the specifics of the studies leave their authors wrangling about econometric techniques and their readers somewhat confused (Goodman and Kramer, 1975). Can we safely conclude, then, with Kramer that the conventional wisdom is correct? Or should we remain skeptical, with Stigler, that fluctuations in aggregate economic conditions should and do affect election returns?

In my judgment Stigler's arguments are not persuasive, irrespective of the sometimes conflicting results of the various econometric studies. Do the parties differ on economic policy? Stigler says no, but other equally-distinguished economists disagree (Okun, 1973). Is retrospective voting silly? Perhaps, but so what? Stigler's arguments reflect the economist's customary confusion between what people do and what he believes they should do. I tend to presume that the voter is a reasonably sensible fellow, but I would not dismiss out of hand models which assume that he isn't. Indeed, is retrospective voting manifestly silly? Numerous political scientists would contest such a judgment (Key, 1961, 473–474; Pomper, 1968, ch. 4). Without going into great detail, retrospective voting is a decision rule which cuts information and decision-making costs (Downs, 1957), which at least offers the voter a way of saying "change!" (Scammon and Wattenberg, 1970, ch. 7), and which encourages representation by providing an incentive for politicians to anticipate constituents' reactions when they make public policy (Friedrich, 1963). One can argue plausibly that

[2] For an intensive individual-level analysis of the negative voting hypothesis see Kernell (1977). For a theoretical application of the negative voting hypothesis see Fiorina (1974), pp. 38–39, and *passim*.

retrospective voting is both individually reasonable and systemically de-
sirable.

Thus, I would reject Stigler's contention that there *should not* be any
link between the incumbents' economic performance and their electoral for-
tunes. Of course, he may eventually prove correct in asserting that there
is no relationship. Still, the latter assertion seems at the least premature.
After all, only one data set has been examined—a time series of the aggre-
gate congressional vote. Only so much information is contained in that
data, and one suspects that the econometric studies already are pushing the
limits. In this paper I will consider another data set—the election surveys
conducted by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center.

The survey series are not nearly so long (1956 to 1974) as the aggre-
gate data series analyzed in the econometric studies. Moreover, survey data
are "soft"—not so amenable to fancy statistical manipulations as are elec-
tion returns and aggregate economic data. In its favor, though, the survey
data are individual, not aggregate. Voters are asked about *their* financial
situations and *their* voting decisions; the existence of some relationship
between the two would appear to be a necessary condition for the existence
of a "true" relationship between the time series of aggregate data previ-
ously discussed.

III. The American Voter as Retrospective Judge of the Parties' Economic Performance

The basic question posed by the economic retrospective voting model
is the following: *whether responsible or not*, does the administration pros-
per in good times and suffer in bad times? In essence, such a model pre-
sumes that the citizen looks at *results* rather than the policies and events
which produce them.

Each election survey since 1956 contains a variant of the following
simple question:[3]

> "During the last few years, has your financial situation been getting better, get-
> ting worse, or has it stayed the same?"

Unlike the indicators of aggregate economic conditions, the data elicited
by this question are perceptual rather than objective.[4] Like the economic

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[3] The wording varied over the years. In some surveys respondents were asked
whether they were better off or worse off than a year ago.

[4] Obviously, we would hope that the two classes of data are correlated, i.e. does
the distribution of attitudes over the three categories roughly correspond to the con-
dition of the economy which objectively prevails? The proportion of the citizenry

indicators though, the data are bound to be "noisey." Just as a national rise in unemployment need not have any personal impact on the citizen, so those factors which have such a personal impact need not be related to national economic conditions. A citizen may feel worse off because of sickness, retirement, a child in college, etc.[5] Thus, the analysis which follows should be considered a conservative test of the relationship between economic conditions and voting behavior.

Measurement questions notwithstanding, the fact remains that the data elicited by the survey question follow the anticipated pattern—at least for some times and kinds of elections. Consider Table 1. Apparently, in 1956 citizens' voting behavior was associated with their perceptions of their changing financial fortunes. Those who believed they were trending upward gave a solid majority to Eisenhower. Those who believed they were trending downward gave a majority to Stevenson. Those who saw no trend fell between the preceding two groups.

TABLE 1

1956 Presidential Vote as a Function of
Perceived Changes in Economic Situation

	Stevenson	Eisenhower
Better	30%	70%
Same	44	56
Worse	55	45

Data analogous to that in Table 1 are available for all presidential and congressional elections from 1956–1974. The remainder of this section reports the analysis of this data. The models employed in the analysis rely on party ID and economic situation as the primary independent variables. Regional controls (South dummies) are also included, and the 1960

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feeling better off reached its minimum (28 percent) in 1974, and its maximum (46 percent) in 1964. The proportion of the citizenry feeling worse off reached its maximum (41 percent) in 1974 and its minimum (5 percent) in 1962. These figures seem to be in accord with objective indicators of the state of the national economy.

[5] Initially I had hoped that data elicited by the relevant SRC probe could be used to assess responsibility, but the codes are quite unhelpful.

models contain a dummy variable for Catholics. In order to allow for differing patterns of reaction between in and out-party identifiers I have specified party-economic condition interactions.[6] For example, consider the basic specification when the Republicans are the incumbent presidential party:

$$Y = a + b_1 \text{ (Ind)} + b_2 \text{ (Rep)} + b_3 \text{ (Dem Same)} + b_4 \text{ (Ind Same)}$$
$$+ b_5 \text{ (Rep Same)} + b_6 \text{ (Dem Better)} + b_7 \text{ (Ind Better)} + b_8 \text{ (Rep Better)} + b_9 \text{ (Dem South)} + b_{10} \text{ (Ind South)} + b_{11} \text{ (Rep South)}$$

where $Y = 1$ if respondent voted for incumbent presidential party

$\qquad = 0$ if respondent voted for challenger party

and, for example, Ind Same $= 1$ if Ind $= 1$ *and* same $= 1$, otherwise Ind Same $= 0$, etc.

Thus, an estimated value, $\hat{Y}$, would be interpreted as the conditional probability that a respondent with given party, region, and economic situation characteristics votes for the incumbent administration. For 1956 one would expect that a northern Democrat whose situation has worsened would vote Republican with some small probability (a), while a northern Republican whose situation has improved would vote Republican with some high probability $(a + b_2 + b_8)$. Presumably a northern Independent whose situation has remained unchanged would show some intermediate probability of voting Republican $(a + b_1 + b_4)$.

A methodological complication arises in the estimation of statistical models such as that just discussed. In the case of a dichotomous dependent variable (e.g., vote Republican, vote Democratic) one of the critical assumptions (homoskedasticity) of standard regression analysis fails. As a result the estimated standard errors of the right-hand side variables are biased, which in turn renders significance tests undependable. I have dealt with this problem by using a maximum likelihood logit procedure. The logit coefficients do not have the same, simple interpretation as the familiar regression coefficients, but the sign patterns should be identical, the relative importance of variables should correspond, and the logit coefficients are subject to accurate tests of significance.[7]

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[6] Because of thinly populated cells I have made use of only the categorical nature of the party ID measure. Recent work by Brody suggests the advisability of such a procedure even when not necessitated by number of cases problems. Interestingly, the statistical results are almost invariably stronger when using the narrow ("pure") classification of independent. See Brody (1975).

[7] Theoretically, logit analysis amounts to fitting a model to the cell proportions

The retrospective model generates several a priori expectations about the estimated coefficients. Considering the model again, one would expect

(1) $b'_i > 0$ $i = 3, \ldots 8$

(2) $b'_8 > b'_5$

    $b'_7 > b'_4$

    $b'_6 > b'_3$

(where the b'_i are the logit coefficients which correspond to the previously discussed regression coefficients).

The first set of hypotheses reflects the expectation that those who perceive their economic situation as constant or improved will be more likely to support the in-party than their fellow partisans whose perceived financial situation has worsened. The second set of hypotheses reflects more specific monotonicity expectations: the better off one is under the incumbent party the greater the probability of supporting it, *ceteris paribus*.

Tables 2–4 contain the coefficient estimates for the economic situation variables.[8] In presidential elections (Table 2) the estimated coefficients are overwhelmingly positive: in twenty-six of thirty cases those who perceive their financial fortunes as constant or improved have higher probabilities of supporting the incumbent party's presidential candidate than those who perceive their situation as worsened. The monotonicity hypotheses fare almost as well: in eleven of fifteen intraparty pairs, those who perceive themselves as better off are more supportive of the incumbent party's presidential candidate than those who perceive no change. Only ten of the thirty estimated coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .05$) however,

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in the appropriate contingency table. The log of the odds formed from these cell proportions is a variable with a range of $-\infty$ to $+\infty$. This transformed variable becomes the dependent variable in a weighted least squares regression whose independent variables are formed from the variables which give rise to the original contingency table (i.e. party, economic situation, region in this case). Operationally, one can apply a maximum likelihood procedure directly to the individual-level data. For a readable explication of logit analysis see Thiel (1972).

    [8] In the interests of space I have not reported the party and region controls. The party coefficients were uniformly of expected sign and significant and usually of the appropriate relative magnitude. Southern Democrats were significantly more democratic than other Democrats prior to 1964, and significantly less so afterwards. *All* equations reported were significant at well beyond the .01 level. That is, party ID is highly correlated with the vote even when economic situation is not, as in the off-year congressional elections.

although a few others come very close.[9] From the standpoint of the retro-spective voting model, 1956 and 1968 look best. All prior expectations hold, and the coefficients are on pretty solid statistical ground (the coeffi-cients of Democrat and Independent Sames in 1968 miss significance in the second decimal place). In contrast, 1964 provides the least support for the economic retrospective model. All in all, though, Table 2 conveys a general impression that citizens' presidential votes are related to their cur-rent economic condition (cf. Niskanen, 1975).

TABLE 2

Economic Retrospective Voting:
Logit Estimates for Presidential Elections

Variable	1956	1960	Year 1964	1968	1972†
Dem Same	.23	.13	.24	.41	1.22*
Dem Better	.75*	.03	.39	.85*	.87*
Rep Same	1.09*	.03	.23	.50	—.07
Rep Better	1.47*	.43	.28	.72	—.69
Ind Same	.69	1.13	—.04	1.78	.31
Ind Better	1.17*	1.45*	—.34	2.40*	1.63*
n =	1266	1409	1115	987	681

* $p < .05$
† question asked only of Form 1 respondents.

Congressional elections are another matter. In the on-year elections (Table 3) there is some weak support for the retrospective model. Twenty-four of thirty coefficients are positive, but only three are significantly so. The monotonicity hypotheses hold in less than half the intraparty pairs, however. The year 1960 provides the relatively strongest support for the

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[9] Strictly speaking, the monotonicity hypotheses demand more than coefficients significantly different from zero: the coefficients of the "better" variable should be significantly larger than the coefficients of the corresponding "same" variables. With so few coefficients passing the weaker test (even satisfying the monotonicity constraint in congressional elections), however, there is little reason to consider the stronger test.

TABLE 3

Economic Retrospective Voting:
Logit Estimates for Congressional On-Year Elections

Variable	1956	1960	Year 1964	1968	1972
Dem Same	.03	.57	.33	.33	.07
Dem Better	.87*	.41	−.91	.23	.09
Rep Same	.34	1.11*	.26	.72	.03
Rep Better	.38	.51	.63	.52	−.08
Ind Same	−.93	1.23	−.41	.73	.81
Ind Better	−.14	1.75*	−1.70	.35	1.50
n =	1119	1171	939	805	569

* p < .05

model, while 1964 again provides the weakest. But the general impression is one of only weak support for the retrospective model.

In congressional midterms (Table 4) there is no case for the economic retrospective model. Exactly half the coefficients have the wrong sign, and two of these anomalies attain statistical significance. The year 1966 offers the most unqualified negative evidence, but even in the notable recession years of 1958 and 1974 we find evidence of economic retrospective voting only among a subset of Democrats who perceive their economic situation as improved. All in all this analysis provides little support for the traditional view that midterm elections constitute a referendum on the incumbent administration's handling of the economy.

IV. A Closer Look: 1962 and 1972

In the preceding section our examination of the economic retrospective voting model relies on a generalized survey question about an individual's personal financial situation. We have no way of knowing whether the individual blames or credits the incumbent administration for his condition, nor do we know whether an individual fears financial duress or expects financial prosperity from economic conditions which have not *as yet* affected his personal economic situation. One way to incorporate these considerations in the analysis is to include additional questions about un-

TABLE 4

Economic Retrospective Voting:
Logit Estimates for Congressional Midterm Elections

Variable	1958	1962	Year 1966	1970	1974
Dem Same	—.19	.09	—1.06**	—.05	.06
Dem Better	1.89*	—.15	—1.01**	1.89	.71*
Rep Same	—.59	.43	—.51	.90*	.13
Rep Better	—.68	.45	—.45	.62	—.32
Ind Same	—.74	—.28	—1.07	.43	.56
Ind Better	.06	.63	—.24	—.26	.12
n =	949	647	650	666	1119

* $p < .05$
** $p < .05$ (wrong sign)

employment (personal and societal), prices, business conditions, etc. The CPS election studies are uneven in their attention to such matters, but two studies—1962 and 1972—contain a variety of specific questions about economic conditions. In this section I will summarize the results of augmenting the earlier analysis with the additional data available for these years.

Both the 1962 and 1972 surveys include questions dealing with voter perceptions of business conditions during the preceding year (improved, worsened, unchanged), personal income during the preceding year (up, down, same), recent trends in prices (up, down, same), and a variety of questions on unemployment. For example, both surveys inquire whether the head of the respondent's household was unemployed during the preceding year. In addition, the 1962 survey asks about levels of unemployment in the respondent's area, and about recent trends in unemployment (increasing, decreasing, constant). Finally, the 1972 survey asks a general question about the government's economic policy (good, fair, poor). I have added dummy variables based on the preceding questions to the 1962 and 1972 analyses previously reported. This gives us an expanded analysis which includes aspects of the local and national economic situa-

TABLE 5

Logit Coefficients for Expanded Analysis: 1962, 1972

Variable	1962 Congressional	1972 Congressional	1972 Presidential
Dem Same	.73	—.24	.37
Dem Better	.47	—.19	.01
Ind Same	.36	.40	—.06
Ind Better	.52	1.00	1.18
Rep Same	.94	—.26	—1.55
Rep Better	1.15	—.45	—1.92**
Business Same	.21	.57	.37
Business Better	.65	.59	.49
Income Same	—.43	.32	.94*
Income Up	—.81	.50	.73*
Prices Same	.07	—.16	.69*
Prices Down	—.72	.17	.15
Unemployed in Last 12 Months	.55	—.10	—.44
No Unemployment in Area	—.02	—	—
Some Unemployment in Area	.13	—	—
Unemployment Decreasing	—.05	—	—
Unemployment Same	—.00	—	—
Government Economic Policy Good	—	.01	2.39*
Government Economic Policy Fair	—	.10	1.40*
n =	416	509	600

* $p < .05$
** $p < .05$ (wrong sign)

tion broader than changes in the citizen's personal economic condition. Table 5 contains the results of this expanded analysis.

In Table 5 we see results which are consistent with those of the preceding section. All the coefficient estimates in Table 5 should be positive. That is, I assume that the average voter prefers falling unemployment to rising, declining prices to rising, a good economic policy to a poor one, etc.[10] For the two congressional elections we do not find a single statistically significant coefficient. Even more damaging, the sign patterns for the two elections are mixed, especially in 1962. This table contains no evidence that perceptions of the state of the country's economy and/or its personal impact on people had any relation to their congressional vote.

The 1972 presidential election results are somewhat more positive. There is the anomaly of a statistically significant negative coefficient for Republicans who perceived themselves as better off. But the overall results show some evidence for economic retrospective voting in the election. The income, price, and business conditions coefficients are all of the correct sign, and several of them are statistically significant. Additionally, the voter's perception of the success of Nixon's economic policy bears a strong relationship to his vote, although this item is one which might be subject to rationalization.

Thus, this expanded analysis reinforces the conclusions reported in the preceding section. Economic retrospective voting? In presidential elections probably yes, in on-year congressional elections maybe, and probably no in midterms.

V. Economic Conditions and Turnout

As mentioned in section II of this paper, Arcelus and Meltzer suggest that economic conditions affect congressional elections through their effects on turnout rather than candidate choice—if economic conditions affect electoral outcomes at all. Though the analysis reported in the preceding sections focuses on candidate choice, I did not ignore the question of voting participation. Rather, I did not find anything of a positive nature to report.

Using the same independent variables as described in section III of

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[10] For each class of dummy variable (business conditions, prices, etc.) the suppressed category was that expected to be least favorable to the incumbent administration: those who saw unemployment as rising, income as falling, etc. Thus, assuming that the average voter prefers low unemployment to high, rising income to falling, etc., the included dummy variables measure departures from an anti-incumbent baseline, and therefore should be positive in sign. Some voters might have opposite expectations (businessmen for unemployment, farmers for rising prices), but surely the assumption holds on average.

this paper I conducted analyses in which the dependent variable was the dichotomy of *vote, not vote*. This analysis did not uncover any systematic effect of economic conditions on turnout. The goodness of fit of the models was considerably lower than those reported in Tables 2 to 4, statistically significant coefficients were few and far between, and even their sign patterns were not consistent. As Table 6 shows, the congressional election of 1958 provides the only exception to an otherwise inconclusive assemblage of coefficient estimates. In this election, those experiencing economic duress appear to have been less likely to vote than those whose situation was holding constant or improving. Note, however, that in the comparable recession year of 1974 the economically worse off were if anything somewhat more likely to vote than those doing better, although not a single coefficient is significant at conventional levels.

TABLE 6

Economic Conditions and Turnout, Logit Coefficients

	1958	1974
Dem Same	.48*	.19
Dem Better	.51*	—.08
Ind Same	.41	—.19
Ind Better	1.40*	—.10
Rep Same	.65*	—.06
Rep Better	.61*	—.30
n =	1,637	2,209

* $p < .05$

Basically, turnout is not well predicted by party affiliations and economic situation, although region has some impact at times. Parenthetically, I might add that one of my students has examined the question of turnout further using more complex models, but in no case has any clear relationship between economic situation and turnout appeared (Al-Adhadh, 1977).

Less positively than Arcelus and Meltzer, then, at the microlevel there is no discernible relationship between economic conditions and voting turnout.

VI. Discussion

This research began as an effort to clarify the muddy picture produced by analyses of the relationship between macroeconomic indicators and aggregate election returns. Unfortunately, that intent has not been realized. Do election returns follow economic conditions? On the basis of this study one can only reply "For some types of election at some particular times." More than that overstates the evidence.

How do we square this negative conclusion with the generally positive results of Kramer's, Lepper's, and Tufte's aggregate level analyses? Perhaps election returns vary not with objective economic conditions but with self-fulfilling expectations about those conditions held by the candidates and parties. Take 1974, for example. Everyone expects a Republican disaster. Thus, serious Republican candidates wait for a more propitious time before seeking office (or a move to a higher office), and Republican incumbents find voluntary retirement more attractive than usual. Meanwhile Republican contributors hesitate to invest funds in an apparently lost cause. Thus, the Republican ticket is composed of underfinanced cannon fodder. In contrast, the Democrats have a plenitude of enthusiastic candidates lavishly financed by those who know a good investment when they see one. Does the Republican decline at the polls reflect objective economic conditions? Or does it reflect a combination of poorer than usual, underfinanced Republican candidates, and better than usual, adequately financed Democratic ones? If the latter, we would find an identifiable (but derivative) macrolevel relationship between economic conditions and voting behavior, although the microlevel analysis would uncover no basis for such an aggregate effect. Certainly I would not deny that voters did react to the objective economic conditions of the Great Depression, but perhaps politicians react more strongly than voters to less catastrophic variations in the unemployment and inflation rates.

One other point deserves attention. Thus far, I have found little support for the *economic* retrospective voting model in congressional elections. But this negative finding does not call into question the basic idea that retrospective voting is a major factor in congressional elections. There are other issues in the world besides the economy, and voters may be reacting to these when they cast their congressional vote. In 1968, for example, dummy variables formed from citizen evaluations of Johnson's performance bear a significant relationship to the congressional vote. And what determines these evaluations of Johnson's performance? Not just financial condition, according to my analysis. As seen in Table 7, United States diplomatic success (lack of), Vietnam, and Civil Rights ranked ahead of

financial condition as determinants of opinions of Johnson's performance.[11] This finding should come as no surprise, but it does raise the question of why voters should hold the congressmen of the presidential party more responsible (albeit indirectly) for some national problems (e.g. Vietnam) than for others (e.g. the economy).

TABLE 7

Determinants of Evaluations of LBJ Performance, 1968

Variable†	Regression Coefficient
Progress in Civil Rights About Right	.36*
Progress in Civil Rights Too Slow	.28*
Right to Fight in Vietnam	.43*
Maybe Right to Fight in Vietnam	.25*
U.S. Doing Well in Foreign Relations	.60*
U.S. Doing Fair in Foreign Relations	.36*
Don't Know How U.S. Doing in Foreign Relations	.19*
Personal Financial Condition Better	.31*
Personal Financial Condition Same	.23*
Democratic Identification	.60*
Independent Identification	—.01
R^2	.25

* $p < .05$
† All variables are dummies with the suppressed category being that theoretically least favorable to LBJ (Civil Rights too fast, wrong in Vietnam, Poor Foreign Relations, worse financial condition, Republican). Thus, all included coefficients should be positive. The regression analysis is confirmed by logit analysis (presentation of the latter for a multicategory dependent variable is more complex than presentation of a regression analysis).

[11] I did not include variables such as presidential performance and noneconomic issue attitudes in the models in section III because I wished the models to be identical over time, and few survey items appear continuously (even with a generous allowance for changes in question wording). This decision opens the analyses to a charge of specification bias. I do not think that any major problem exists: responses to the personal financial condition items are not highly correlated with items such as those in Table 7.

To conclude a research report with a call for further study has become a platitude. But given the ambiguity in which this study ends, there is no other way to conclude.

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